THE TOWER

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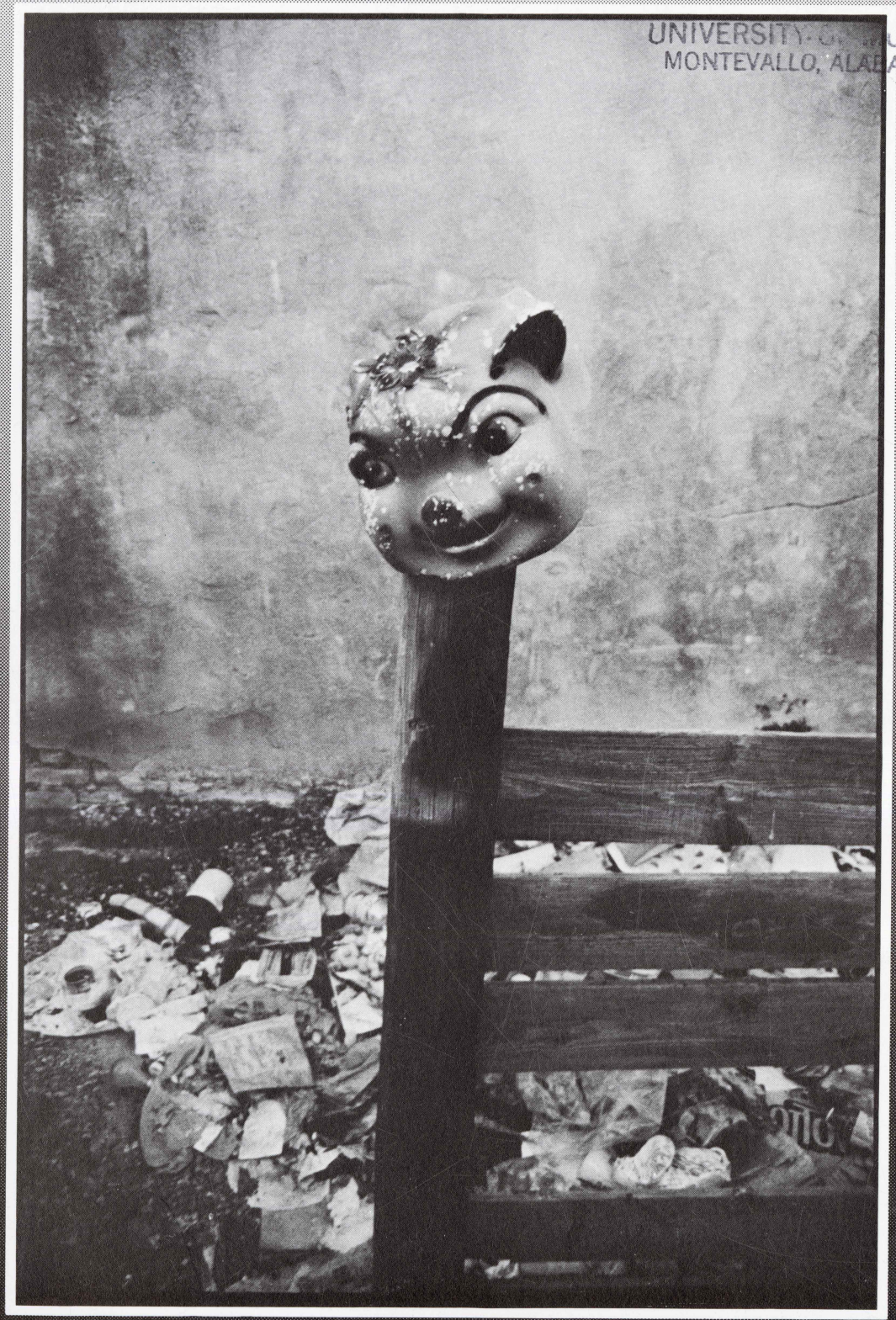

SPRING 1988

THE TOWER

Spring 1988
Literary/Arts Magazine
University of Montevallo

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I would like to especially thank Mr. Richard Dendy for help with the cover design and Mr. Bill Plott for his saintly patience.

To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone:

From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink – greetings!

— Eric Blair

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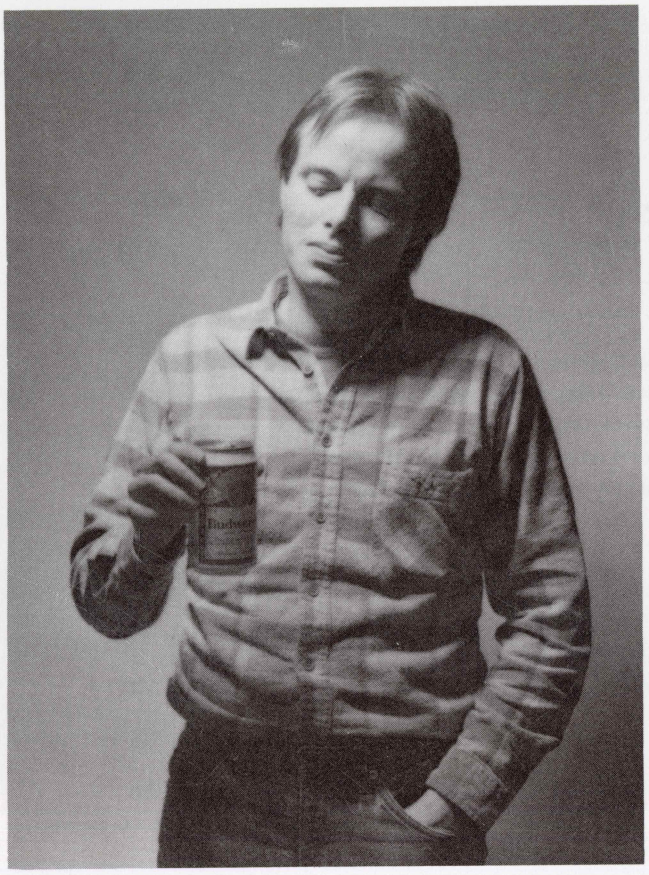
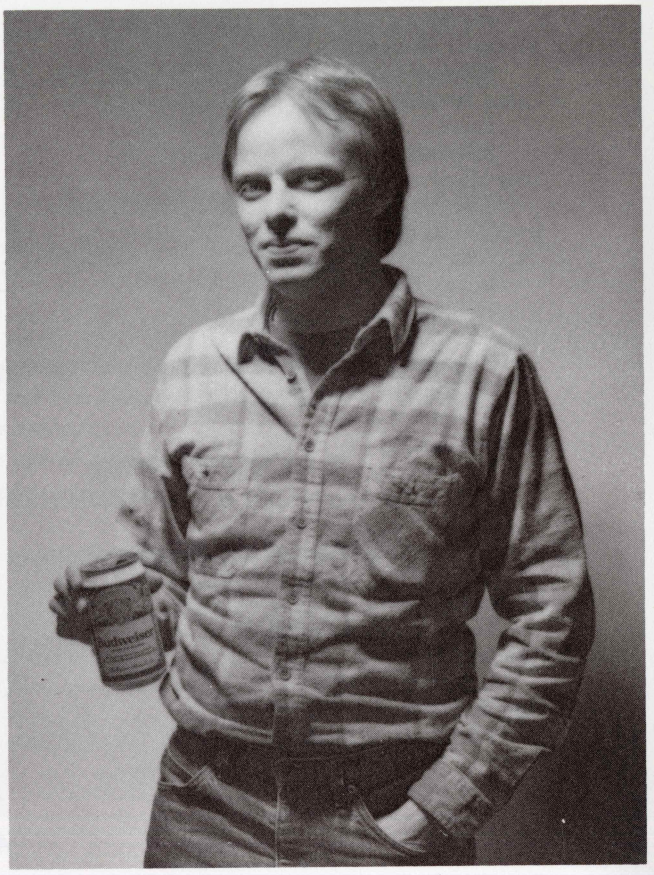




This edition of *The Tower* is dedicated to Danny Gamble, a student.

Amity

You sat — a stone unbroken.
You cried and no tears came.
"Peace," an utterance of familiar words
As we watched vessels atop raving waters
Sails tightly roped around sturdy masts.

Long hours, we spent, in quiet rooms.
Darkened corners made lit only
By small, scented candles.

As the days fly, passed in mortal agony,
As the reckonings of hours turn to years,
Processions of better days
And nights caressed by dawn's golden bough.

You gave me a shove!
And I dug.
You touched the beckoning earth,
And flowers came streaming;
Crimson and golden, violet-blue.

We sat on the crystalline porch
Supping and watching waves go by,
Waves touched by sailing ships;
Masts full-blown with sails open
To the caressing of the corpulent wind.

***

Andrew Cawthon is a senior psychology major from Blountstown, FL

Shadow-bound

Walking through the woods
Thinking of space, deep and cold and
Lit here and there with
Stars and planets uncounted,
I shift my thoughts to
The people of our Earth
So many of them
Locked in conflict with each other
Raising their voices
While the universe slowly,
Coldly, quietly unfolds
Outside our crawling, babbling planet.
Such immensity, such silence there
In the depths of the universe, I muse —
Then squint
At a sudden shaft of
Sunlight cut by voices from nearby.
I return to the Earth, bathed in sunlight,
Not just a spirit
But a body —
Shadow-bound.

***

Alison H. Simpson is a senior psychology major from Jacksonville.

Adrift

A ragged man stood on a windy cliff above the choppy waters of Lake Superior. His baggy tan pants, stained at the knees, flapped in the wind. The flannel shirt he wore beneath a long, navy blue coat was thin, but clean. Gray ravelled wool socks bulged over his worn high-topped work boots; the laces knotted where they were broken. He looked out toward his fishing boat anchored in the harbor. It bobbed and swayed within the swells, the bottom painted, though chipped, a dark green and the upper half, a dirty white. His face looked years older than he actually was; a wisdom shown from hard work and harsh elements. Yet it was an ageless face, as if it would look that way until he was a hundred years old. He sat down on a protruding rock and reached into his coat and pulled out a small draw-string pouch filled with cheap tobacco and a package of rolling papers. He made the cigarette without thinking about it — an automatic response. He was thinking about his life and his profession. The sulpher flared from the kitchen match tip; the yellowy smell mingled with the clean cold wind.

Commercial fishermen and their fishing boats were seen less and less frequently now on the Great Lakes. A man couldn't make enough money to eat on. Why did he go on? He wasn't sure, as he looked out over the miles of water, but he knew he couldn't stop fishing. He felt it was deep in his soul, like some ancient viking soul was connected with his, guiding him to his destiny. He smiled into the air as he crushed out the stub of cigarette. Such lofty thoughts this morning. He got up stiffly and started back through the small crop of birch and cedar trees. He knew what people said about him. He had his mind stuck in the sixties, never to return to the world of reality. He thought it was funny, and it didn't bother him one bit. His mother's voice echoed and reverberated in his memory. "Sam C. Meddleson, you could be anything you want to be, honey. For God's sake, you were valedictorian of your high school class, and you were doing so well at the University of Chicago . . . I just don't understand you. We'll give you anything, sweetheart; you know that all you have to do is ask us." Sam shook his head. He couldn't help it if they didn't see the *big picture.*

He hiked the narrow trail that wound down the hillside to the bay. The wind tried to snatch his long hair from underneath his plain blue stocking cap. The leaden sky didn't show any sign of breaking up, its oppressive weight hung low, trying to meet the water. The small rowboat he used to row the distance to the middle of the bay was beached on a small rocky beach that nestled between two high cliffs. The bay was formed by a large jutting mass of rock that stretched out into the icy waters and then curved around gently for about a mile, small cliffs and beaches scattered in and out along the picturesque scene. A rocky island, red and gray with two pine trees on its point, rested out in the bay, looking every inch a battleship protecting its home harbor. Sam pushed the small weather-beaten row-boat into the clear water, waves bumping against it. His foot dragged in the water as he pushed off. The boat teetered with his weight at first, but soon settled into the rhythm of the waves.

Sam wanted to check his fishing tug's anchor and make sure the engine hatch was secured. His bones told him it was going to blow and rain for a good while once it got started. His arms stroked back and forth with powerful sweeps that cut through the small choppy waves toward the fishing boat. The old oar locks, broken and clinking against the sides of the rowboat, was a pleasant and familiar sound. His mind cleared with the pure physical activity. He felt alive here. Sam reached the boat quickly, gliding up to the back and tied a nylon rope to one of the cleats there. He boosted himself up on the back and swung his legs over. The waves bounced the light rowboat against the bigger, heavier boat like a cat batting a ball of string. Sam quickly checked the chain to the anchor, pulling on the fastened end in short, hard tugs. He nodded in satisfaction and moved about the rest of the boat with a masterful confidence, testing this line, that piece of machinery. It was all secure. The cold wind stung his face as he looked to the thin dark line of the horizon. It was time to get home.

Sam untied the rope and turned around to lower himself in the rowboat. He felt his foot slide on the slimy fish scales along the back of the tug. He tried to regain his footing, doing a quick two-step, but he couldn't stop himself from falling. He flailed his arms out to the side and fell back-wards. His back smashed into the bench seat in the middle of the rowboat; a shard of pain jolted to his teeth as his head crashed at the edge of the bow. Flashes of white light floated away into a black abyss.

He swam and rose from a soft black cushion into a sharp gray light. It took some time to realize that he was looking up into the sky. He was being rocked from side to side by large swells. He wasn't in the bay any more. He tried to sit up suddenly; a bright hot pain shot through the back of his head. He sat up more slowly, rubbing the back of his head to see if he was alright. Sam stopped with his hand to his head; a cold fear crept into his lower stomach. The oars were gone!

"Great. Just don't panic," Sam said out loud. He didn't know how long he had been out. The sky was already showing the darkening of late afternoon. He searched the boat for his wire-rimmed glasses, but they were nowhere to be found. "Must've bounced out of the boat when I hit," he thought. The wind and the slapping waves had pushed him far enough out to where the shore was indescript. He tried to ease the panic by looking to the shore for a landmark where he could get a feel for where he was. He squinted, looking for the lighthouse by Split Rock, but he couldn't see well without his glasses. He felt he was traveling rapidly in a southeasterly direction, drifting farther and farther out into the lake.

Sam put his hands into his armpits to keep them warm. "Okay. Everything's going to be alright," Sam said, trying to look at his situation rationally. "I'm not hurt too bad, just a

bump. If the wind keeps blowing this hard and in the same direction, I should eventually reach the Apostle Islands. Maybe. People live on some of those islands." He tried hard not to think that it was over twenty miles in cold stormy weather.

How many people had died on these waters, Sam wondered. Fishermen? Workers on the great ore boats? "Oh you are getting morbid now, Sam ole boy." Darkness was almost complete. The wind continually whistled around Sam's ears. His feet were painfully numb. He tried to keep them moving back and forth, up and down. The temperature must have been about forty degrees, but it felt closer to thirty degrees with the wind. He had been lucky — if anything about his situation could be considered lucky — that it hadn't rained. Hours had passed in darkness, white caps peaking and foaming. Sam was shivering now, his muscles jittering all over his body. He hugged himself and beat his arms across his body. Sam knew from experience that shivering was the body's way of trying to keep warm. He welcomed the spastic movements. The dark water beckoned him into an icy sleep. It would only be a matter of a few short minutes; his legs and arms would numb with cold, movement slowing, freezing up. "That's right, Sam, keep up that positive attitude," he said out loud, the wind taking his vibrating words, tearing them apart and scattering them over the violent water. The water slapped and sloshed into the boat, wetting his heavy coat. His feet felt like lumps of ice, the worn leather boots darkened and wet. The fear that he had been trying to suppress washed over him in a sickening wave. He felt his body going numb, and when he went totally numb, he would die.

Sam's frozen eyelids closed and he snapped them open, moving his arms and legs in a frenzied panic. He was beginning to stiffen up; his joints felt as if the cartilage was starting to weld and fuse together. Time lost its meaning as it moved on anciently. Sam couldn't measure it. Then lightness started in the sky. Another day. The wind shifted and swept into his face towards the south-southwest. He didn't notice this for quite sometime. He wasn't quite sure, but he figured this meant he would be blown in the direction of Duluth. That was a greater distance than the Apostle Islands. Sam didn't know where he was. Land masses could be seen, but not recognized, outlined on the horizon in a gray-blue.

The day passed in a light drizzle that began at dawn with a cold wind that chilled his bones. White spots had formed on his stiffened cheeks. His feet no longer felt like lumps of ice, he couldn't feel them at all. "God, I will make it, please God, I need to hold on," Sam muttered between clenched teeth. He wanted to sleep. He wanted to embrace it. He curled up in the bottom of the boat as best he could. Sleep would be bliss. He had no stamina left and wanted to escape this icy, lonely nightmare.

Sam awoke, staring into the side of the boat. It was dusk. He was so stiff he couldn't move. How did I wake up? Something was echoing in his brain. Maybe I'm dead and drifting in hell. Sam smiled, but his face didn't move. The bullhorn sounded again; a loud and nasal sounding voice blasted near Sam's boat. What? He couldn't move! That's what woke me up! His voice was weak and barely audible. "Hey! Hey! Good God! Hey!" He raised his hand a few inches.

"He's alive!" the voice yelled. "Hang on there! This is the United States Coast Guard. We'll be there in a minute, just hang on!"

Sam soon felt the heavy thump of the large vessel against his small rowboat. He made it! He beat this unforgiving death trap! The rowboat rocked as someone entered it. Arms were around him.

"We'll have you out of here in a jiffy." Warm, brown eyes looked concerned into his dull blue ones as the stranger patted his frozen shoulder. The harness went around his chest and between his legs, large metal clips snapped into place. The man motioned with his hand in a circular motion and the harness grew taunt. Sam croaked out a pitiful scream and thankfully fell unconscious.

Flashbulbs and camera shutters went off around him like machine gun fire as the paramedics loaded him into the ambulance. A thick black padded microphone was shoved in Sam's face. A Mini-Cam lens stared blackly at him.

"Mr. Meddleson, what were your thoughts of survival out there in the middle of Lake Superior all alone?" The microphone stretched closer to his face. Sam opened his mouth to speak, but the Paramedic stopped him.

"Sorry lady, we gotta get him to St. Lukes right away." The door slammed. Cameras continued to click.

A month later, Sam watched the sun glint on the wave tops from his cabin. A cup of coffee had gone cold in his hand. His toes still tingled and itched where there were none. Three toes from his left foot were too frostbitten to save, they had said. Oh well, Sam thought and smiled. It will give him character. A knock on the front door brought him out of his musings.

"How are you feeling today, Sammy?" his mother asked from the door. She threw her coat over the wooden rocker by the wood stove. She didn't wait for an answer. "I've got great news for you! I talked to Shelby Johnson down at the plant; she has some pull at the hiring office down there you know. Well, she said that she could almost guarantee you a job. Isn't that great?"

She watched Sam nervously.

"Yeah, I guess that would be great, Mom." He turned back to the window, his blue eyes seriously searching the water. "But I have to get my nets ready for next week. I'm counting on a big load of herring."

"What! You can't be serious . . . not after what happened to you. Sam, think for a change. This is your big chance for a future. You have to forget about fishing now," she said with great conviction.

Sam turned and faced her, his eyes soft and curious — he was puzzled. "Why would I do that?"

***

Nancy Jenkins is an English/education graduate student from Birmingham.

Peace

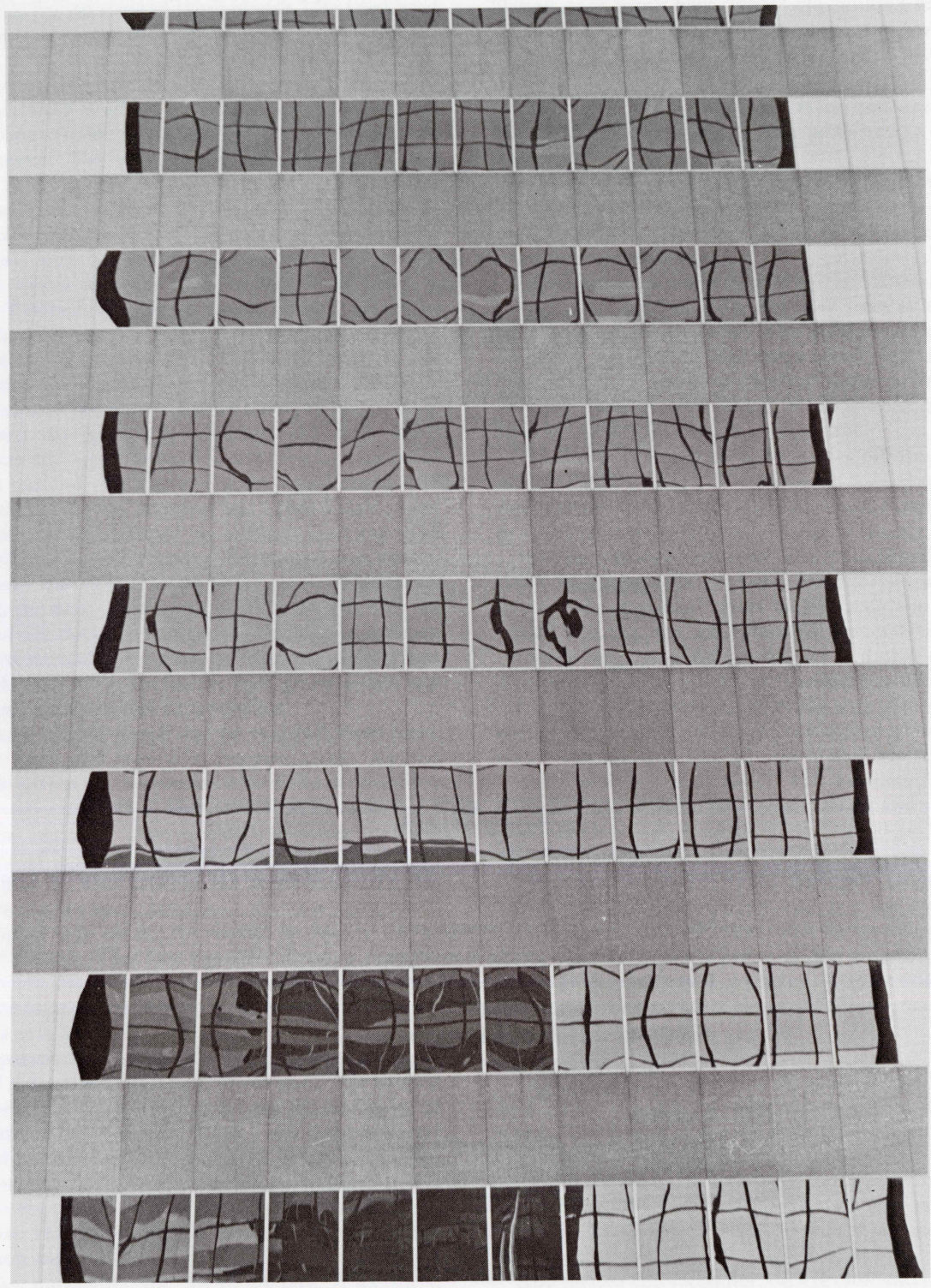
Shine like on rain
on curled pickles
fingers old so
they are wrapped
uselessly wrackled-rough
round pointy cane
and hat rim and
peacocks pass sly
pigeons sticky as flies
lazy eyes stare into
spaceship photo albums
to recall,
maybe licensed to dream;
pumpkin headed children grand
test veins and strength
and fear never sleeps in
a deathbed
close to
you
grandpa
close
two
eyes

Jellyfish

you can tell i am there
but you look right through me
i feed upon the careless sardine
that finds itself caught between my tentacles
i have no home; i float
where the tide takes me i care not,
so long as there is food
for i am mindless
spineless
the pimple on the face of a wave
that flips me onto the beach
where i lie a salted slug
baking in the sun

***

Craig Stroud is a junior English major from Montevallo.



Gary Blackmon is a junior art major from Montevallo.

Heroes and Other Conversations

Fifty thousand screaming fans packed Anaheim Baseball Stadium on a muggy September night to watch the California Angels take on the Seattle Mariners. It was a game which had little meaning or value, aside from the television revenue both teams would receive for playing that night. The Angels already held a 7½ game lead over the second place team and the playoffs were only weeks away. Their opponents, the Mariners, were 21 games out of first place and were already mathematically eliminated from playoff contention. The Mariners had all the makings of a perennial last place ballclub: poor hitting, poor defense, poor pitching, and poor baserunning. The Angels, on the other hand, had a competitive owner with a seemingly bottomless pocket, so they had the best talent money could buy; a baseball juggernaut that steamrolled over any team that got in its way.

The heart and soul of the Angel lineup was outfielder and power-hitter extraordinaire Don McCloskey. McCloskey was a thoroughbred, a big man whose power and speed were matched only by his pure athletic talent. When McCloskey came to bat in the bottom of the first inning, the crowd gave him a thunderous ovation which rocked the stadium, and for good reason. McCloskey was a shoo-in to win the league as Most Valuable Player award, but he was also one of the city's most popular celebrities. His civic activities and contributions to charity, as well as his baseball feats, made him a role model for people all over the nation, and an almost godlike figure in Anaheim.

The Mariners' catcher, Steve Mayer, had been a teammate of McCloskey's back in the minor leagues. Mayer was an adequate catcher, but his career had been hampered by injuries, and his future in baseball was always subject to question. He had worn too many different jerseys during his seven-year major league career, but he couldn't complain. Luck seemed to be the only thing keeping him in baseball. Fate was the only thing that deposited him in Seattle. Still, he liked playing the Angels and he liked catching with McCloskey at the plate because the conversations were never dull.

McCloskey took two practice swings, ignored the signals from the third-base coach, and stepped into the batter's box. He turned a bleary eye on Mayer. "How's his curve breakin' tonight?" he groaned.

"Pretty good. Why?" Mayer already knew the answer; it was the same every time.

"Man, I'm so damn hungover I can't see. And I've gotta tape that damn United Way commercial in the morning."

Mayer chuckled. "Man, I wish I could afford to come to a game like that. As it is, Coach says I've gotta at least hit my weight this year or he's sending me down to Double-A. God, I hate bus rides!

"You need a guaranteed contract like me, Mayer. I get 900 grand a year whether I play or not. Every so often, I need a rest; I fake a pulled hamstring and sit out a couple of games. Besides, for that kind of money, they ain't gonna send me to the minors, anyway."

"STRIKE ONE!" the umpire yelled as the fastball caught the outside corner of the plate.

"Hey, Don," Mayer continued, "what's all this I hear about your roommate?"

"Davis? Yeah, he pitched a three-hitter against the Sox on Tuesday night, then he checked into a rehab clinic for cocaine abuse Wednesday morning. When I heard the news, I about freaked."

"Coke'll do some funny things to you."

McCloskey shook his head. "I mean, how could he do that with the playoffs comin' up? We needed that son-of-a-bitch." His voice dropped slightly as he added, "He couldn't have held out two months. Two more lousy months."

The throw from the pitcher came in low and the umpire called out, "No, no! Ball one!"

McCloskey let out a low moan. "Damn! I saw three balls that time." He shut his eyes tight, then opened them again. "I gotta start cuttin' back on that tequila."

"You're not gonna be able to make any commercials tomorrow," Mayer said.

"Hell, I'll just get'em to postpone it. Five-figure donations make'em get over stuff like that real quick."

Mayer flashed the signal to the pitcher. "I thought you liked that charity stuff."

McCloskey stepped out of the batter's box, adjusted his sweatbands and his helmet, and stepped back. "Man, my agent handles all that stuff. He figures it's good PR, you know? Tell ya the truth, retarded kids make me *real* nervous."

The next pitch, a curveball, sunk over the plate and crossed just above McCloskey's knees. "STRIKE TWO!" the umpire shouted. Mayer threw the ball back to the pitcher.

"Time out, ump," McCloskey said. "Check that ball; I think he's cutting it." The umpire called time out and walked to the mound to see if, indeed, the pitcher was defacing the ball in an attempt to make it harder to hit.

Mayer stood up to stretch his legs. "Don," he said, "Stephens is only twenty-two. He doesn't even know *how* to cut a baseball yet."

McCloskey rubbed his eyes again. "I know, I just needed a breather."

Mayer hesitated a moment, then asked, "How 'bout you, Don? Just between you and me, do you cork your bats?"

McCloskey laughed. "Hell no, Mayer. Cork's dead. Everybody's checkin' for it now. Me, I use water capsules. You just drill holes in it, like this." He pointed to three small, almost indistinguishable refilled holes in the head of the bat. "The flow of the water gives you a lot more power than cork, plus there's not an ump or league commissioner around smart enough to find it."

Mayer shrugged and returned to his crouching position. "Makes sense, I guess. I've never used anything myself."

The umpire, unable to find anything wrong with the ball, began his march back to the plate. Before he reached it, McCloskey whispered to the catcher, "You oughta think about it, Mayer." He patted the stick, adding, "Guaranteed to add years to your career."

The umpire resumed play, and the pitcher went into his motion. He uncoiled and released a hard fastball, which was supposed to sink before hitting Mayer's mitt. However, the ball did not drop as intended, and instead stayed high in the strike zone just long enough for McCloskey to shift all his weight into it. With a solid crack, the spheroid flew off the bat into the sky and quickly deposited itself in the standing mass of spectators in the left-centerfield seats. The fans roared their approval as McCloskey rounded the basepaths and eventually returned to step on home plate. It was obvious to Mayer by the distorted look on McCloskey's face that the loud cheering was not helping his hangover one bit.

"Good shot, Don. The fans are eatin' it up," Mayer kidded, tossing a new ball to the shaken young pitcher.

The grimace was replaced by a barely-managed grin on McCloskey's face. "Of course, Mayer." He motioned his head to the stands, indicating the fans, and said, "I'm their hero!"

Mayer nodded. "See ya in the third inning."

McCloskey trotted back to the dugout to the uniform chant of "DON-NIE! DON-NIE!" Seconds later, he reemerged at the top of the dugout steps, tipped his helmet and blew a kiss to the appreciative crowd, and descended again into his hole.

***

Culley Scarborough is a junior English major from Pinson Valley.

THE FLY

(Inspired by and with respects to Poe's "The Raven")

Once upon a Wednesday morning, while I lay awake and horny
Due to many an explicit dream rendered on the night before,
there I was feeling low and scuzzy; I heard a noise and it was buzzy
As if something small and fuzzy buzzed about my bedroom door.
"Tis only TV static," said I, "buzzing at my bedroom door.
This it is, and nothing more."

Ah, but vaguely, I remembered, the TV is but now an ember
Struck by lightning in December, now it's piled on the floor.
Eagerly I sought awakeness, strength to face the world's fakeness,
I looked upon my mind's opaqueness; it was rotten to the core;
Dark and rancid was my psyche, filled with slag and trash galore.
Nothing there did I adore.

And the rustling of my cover made me wish I had a lover:
"Thrill me! Fill me!" said she. "I've never gone this far before!"
So now, to still the tension of my pulsating erection
I listened for a faint detection of the buzzing at my door.
"An untuned radio transmission," said I, "buzzing at my bedroom door.
How on earth could it be more?"

Presently my ears grew weaker from the din of the thundering speaker.
"Sis," said I, "or brother, for your mercy I implore;
Forgive me for my foul preaching, but your radio is screeching;
From my brain the noise is leeching —" here I opened up the door.
Nothing but a distant snore.

Deep into the hallway peering, I found the buzzing noise was nearing
And my fat cat sat there sneering, just an arm's length from the door.
Down upon her helm I clobbered with the pillow on which I'd slobbered
While I had the kinds of dreams I'd never had before;
Then I listened once again for the sound I'd heard before,
And I heard the buzz no more.

Back into the bedroom turning, eyes bloodshot and stomach churning
Soon again I was discerning noises louder than before;
I was tired, my eyes were saggy, but I spotted a rustling baggie
as if something little and scraggy crawled upon my littered floor;
As if my hamster had escaped his cage as he had done before.
The noise was too much to ignore.

Upward here I flung the plastic, my motions unbelievably spastic,
And upward fluttered a slovenly Fly, much bigger than I'd seen before.
Most obnoxious was the beating of his wings as he, retreating,
Flew and perched and sat secreting all his body's stock and store;
Dropping Fly dung in the air vent just above my bedroom door.
He just squatted and let it pour.

Then this nasty bug destroying all the thoughts I'd been enjoying
With the loud and caustic droning of the haggard wings it wore
Filled my senses with a loathing of the moths that eat my clothing
Creeping things that I've seen floating in my cereal before,
Tiny fleas that suck the blood from each and every minute pore;
Bugs that trot across the floor.

"Get thee from here!" said I loudly, but the Fly just sat there proudly
Glaring at me with the compound eyes his little noggin bore.
"Go away, you beastly insect! You're not even fit to dissect!
You're the result of a defeat much like those in fabled lore!
Keep thine droppings to thyself and let me see you nevermore!"
Quoth the insect: "Sycamore!"

Once the creature's voice had sounded, I stood silent and dumbfounded
For its utterance had no meaning, and no relevancy bore;
So becoming aggravated at the silliness dictated,
I said, "I've assassinated many of your kind before;
Go infest a puppy's buttocks; buzz around my room no more!"
Quoth the insect: "Sycamore!"

"Fiend!" I shouted. "Thing of evil! Fiend always if Fly or weevil!
Go away and let me ponder why my life is such a bore!
Show me no abomination, take back your contamination,
Cease your wretched defecation in the vent above my door;
Take thine unclean countenance away from here for evermore!"
Quoth the insect: "SYCAMORE!"

"FIEND!" I shouted. "Thing of evil! Fiend always if Fly or weevil!
You can *stick* your foul buzz, transparent wings and sycamore!"
Then the Fly began devolving from the vent and came revolving
'Round my head, my brains dissolving from the buzz that buzzed once more;
He tormented my left ear with what he'd spoken thrice before —
Screeched the insect: "SYCAMORE!!"

And the screeching hurt so badly that I stood there flailing madly
Swatting at him with a slipper that I'd picked up from the floor.
"Find another occupation; stop this reeking irritation;
Quit your rancid vociferation; just don't say it anymore!
I detest it — I can't stand it — just don't say it anymore!"
Wailed the insect: "SYCAMORE!!"

And the Housefly, never flitting, still is sitting, still is shitting
In the open air vent just above my bedroom door;
And with legs the length of stubble, there he floats just like a bubble,
High above the pile of rubble that lies rotting on the floor;
And my body from that rubble that lies rotting on the floor
Shall be lifted — Nevermore!

* * *

Dan Mazikowski is a sophomore mass communications major from Huntsville.

Jeff's Journal — Tuesday April 21 11:35 pm

Tonight was interesting. I went to Bruno's to rent a movie (Bruno's is the only place I know of to rent a movie after nine), but I ended up getting there after ten. It was too late to get a movie, but I thought that as long as I was there, I might as well get a can of cheese dip to eat with some chips while I watched Letterman. I was in no hurry to get my cheese dip and leave. I had another hour or so before Letterman came on, so I started to mosey around the store.

I had been walking around for a few minutes when this woman with her kid caught my eye. People normally don't go shopping with their little kids after ten. The boy looked like he might have been about five. He had light brown hair and was wearing a Replacments tee-shirt. I thought this was strange. He was getting screwdrivers off the shelf and throwing them up in the air to stick in the ceiling.

To see if anyone else was noticing the little vandal's behavior, I glanced around, but didn't see anyone. I stepped over to act like I was looking at some paint so I wouldn't be so obvious while I watched them. "Look mamma!" the kid yelled. The mother stood, intensely staring at some extension cords. "Mamma!" the little boy shouted again. He grabbed her dress and yanked it lightly as he pointed excitedly at the ceiling. "Look what I did!"

"Shut up, Glenn," the woman softly said without so much as glancing in the kid's direction. The boy quietly pressed his face against the side of their grocery cart and stared into it. I felt sorry for the kid.

I looked up at the woman and noticed for the first time how pretty she was. She was thin and had blonde hair with a streak of black on the side. She had on a sleeveless pink dress and a thin gold necklace. For a moment, all I could think about was screwing that girl.

The brat had climbed over and gotten a can of Pop-n-Fresh biscuit dough out of the basket. He inspected the can for a moment, then turned and looked up at his mother. He grinned and slammed the can of dough against the side of the cart. The can made a loud pop with a sort of screaming sound as it burst open. A large white blob fell onto the floor with a splat. The boy stepped back a few feet and hesitantly watched his mother. The woman set the extension cords into the basket and stoically looked at the lump of dough on the floor.

The family-size glob of biscuit dough suddenly started jiggling. Then, like some clay animation video, the lump of dough shaped itself into a chunky, miniature dough-man. The stunted biscuit fellow beheld his new environment briefly, then strolled happily up the aisle and around the opposite corner from where I stood.

This, of course, was a very unexpected event. I was in the process of appreciating the amazing episode as the woman finally took notice of the child. She stared at him and he backed up against the shelves. She squinted and pouted in an attempt to look mean. When I think about it, this girl was probably too young to be his mother. Maybe she was his sister. Whatever, she put a hand on the cart and said in a low, breathy voice, "Now you're going to get it." She tossed her hair over her shoulder and noticed me. I froze. I couldn't take my eyes off her.

She vaguely smirked and returned her attention to the boy who was now huddled in the floor at her feet. She raised her foot and gently removed her shoe. She had a thin gold chain around her ankle. I leaned against the shelf to watch. She slowly bent over the boy, placed a hand gently on his back, and brought her shoe down sharply against his head. The child screamed as she struck him several more times. Then she stepped back and began to return her shoe to her foot.

The youngster stood, weeping, and the girl paused before replacing her shoe. Tears ran down the kid's face and he stared spitefully at the girl. He clenched his fists and gritted his teeth. Then, after taking a deep breath, he cried violently, "You bitch! You shitty sleazy mother-fucking old whore!" He stopped his flow of obscenities and stared at her, panting through clenched teeth, and waited for her retaliation.

She calmly sat the shoe on top of her extension cord, then kicked the boy sharply across the bridge of his nose with a loud crack. She looked up at me as she removed a handkerchief from her purse and began wiping the child's blood from her stockinged foot.

There was a groan and my eyes dropped to the boy lying on the floor. Blood flowed across his face and he raised his hand to point upward. He sputtered on the blood streaming into his mouth from his nose as he moaned "Look. Look what I did."

The girl tilted her head up to see the screwdrivers in the ceiling. One of the screwdrivers had come loose as she glanced up and stuck upright in her throat like a knife in a block of cheese. She stumbled backward, her arms pivoting wildly behind her, grasping for support. The tool had wedged itself in her throat at such an angle that she couldn't scream or move her head. One hand caught her handbag as she fell over, scattering the contents of the purse across the floor. The other hand had broken her fall. She laid back onto the floor and thrashed around spastically.

I walked over to her. The screwdriver must have missed whatever vital veins or arteries that were in her neck, because she wasn't bleeding. She was choking, so I grabbed the handle of the tool and pulled. It was jammed in pretty hard. I jerked it a few times, but it held tight. I knelt down

beside her and put my arm around her shoulders for leverage and pulled as hard as I could. Her tongue flopped around and her eyes rolled at strange angles and she made some awful gasping and gagging sounds.

Finally, it tore loose with a violent squish and an unusual clear liquid trickled from her wound. It must have been spit, but who am I to say. I sat her head on her purse and covered the glistening slit on her neck with her handkerchief. She held the handkerchief in place.

Her breathing began to return to normal. I casually sat my hand on the girl's knee. We stared into other's eyes as I slid my hand up her inner thigh to the crotch of her panties.

There was a firm, yet mushy poke at my side and I turned. The little biscuit man stood next to her ankle, holding a bag with a receipt stapled to it. I noticed that he had made himself some eyes with a couple of raisins. He opened his tiny mouth and stated in a surprisingly deep voice, "If you were here for the cheese dip, I just got the last can."

"Oh. Well, that's OK," I said. He smiled, gave me the thumbs-up sign and wandered off toward the front of the store.

I draped the girl's dress back down over her knees and looked at my watch. I could never make it to Krogers and back before Letterman. The girl's dark blue eyes watched me as I stood up. "I really ought to be going now," I said. I couldn't think of much to say. "Well, maybe we'll see each other again some time," I added. Her face remained emotionless, but she nodded once in reply.

As I turned, I stepped on the young boy's outstretched hand. I pretended not to notice and continued out of the store.

Letterman turned out to be a rerun that I'd already seen. I guess I'll just go to bed. Oh well.

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Chris Chapman is a freshman accounting major from Huntsville. He is also the creator of ***Fred's****, Montevallo's own underground newsletter.*

Zero G

In space I would love to be,
Existing in zero-G.
I find it appealing
To sit on the ceiling
Or hang (right-side-up)
From a tree.

Beach Party

It was a plastic-faced
Cover girl
Nightmare
Hundreds of them
On a beach
Emanciated bodies
Prancing playfully
In a parody
Of sexual enticement.
Cheek bones
Rivalled by hip bones
Vacant eyes
The windows
To empty souls,
Stark white smiles
With teeth as straight
As prison bars
Flashing neon appeals
At the cameras
They long to seduce.

Perspective

The hand-gernade called Earth . . .
A disembodied hand
Poised on the pin
In the anticipation
Of flinging human shrapnel
Across the field of stars.

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Jerri Buckingham is a senior English major from El Paso, Texas.

Kazuo Moriya is a senior art major from Tokyo, Japan.

The Clock Ticks in Time with Our Breathing

Sitting here alone, I stare
at flat crisp clean pastels
of a wall papered in straight lines.
My eyes, my appetite, and an apple pie
hold my attention before those lines —
lines handwritten upon the wall.

As I eat alone in McDonald's
with the pie that burns my fingers,
I become 50 billion sold plus one.
And I look toward all the businessmen
whose only souls lie beneath their shoes
as they tap in time and in tune
with the Muse they call the Man.

Walking in Your Footsteps

The air still reeks
of breeze jamming,
sweet sax playing,
and the presence of you.

No prints to trace, no trace remains
of steps on sand, the mud or clay.
Just 2 limping shadows —
me in a sweet black dress,
one that no longer fits,
with you packaged all in white
so dashing — matching
right down to your boots.

thinking about how bad it is
to find sweetness in rotten things . . .
2 blond bookends — a matching pair
a butchered weasel on Lady Fair.
making sport of my Southerness . . .
pseudo-superstars and my bad French . . .
Paul Schaffer, Howie Mandel,
even Superman's cameo . . .
so many things resurrect my dreams
bringing back the essence of you.

The air still wreaks
of blues wailing,
jazz swaying,
and of my perfume.

A State of Being

Feeling like a trashed street poet
who has nothing more to do
with the theme or even the Muse
of sickening tomorrows
or tacky yester-scenes —
a lonely Lady Lazarus
singing them blues again.
Still . . . Ginsberg and Snyder
and of course my mirror
keep me in pretty good company
until these beatniks and rednecks
who shuffle for the American dream,
trash a silly street poet
jousting the alphabet.

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Teri E. Wilbanks is a graduate English major from Bessemer.

I'll Sleep When I'm Dead

The boy opens the door at 0600, on time, yelling. "You want up now, got to go back to ship." He says something in Tugalag to the girl in the bed next to you. They laugh in the odd language. You know it's at you. The room was white ten or fifteen years ago. The plaster might have been smooth; gekos and cockroaches that should have pet names, jockey for position on the shit-brown battlefield of the wall. You pitch over the bed and throw-up. The girl is sharp toothed from eating sugar cane. She is from the provinces and she is ugly. But it is uglier in your head. What had she cost? Oh yeah, 50 Peso: five dollars American. Wincing at the thought of grinding over the wretch, and the thought of all that alcohol, you move. You put on shorts, flip-flops and go. She hammers in broken English, "Tip, tip where my tip!" Feeling surly you spit at her and it causes white pain behind your eyes. You grab her clothes from the chair and carry them out with you.

She won't follow into the street. The clothes deposited at the desk, you stumble into the street putting on a T-shirt. The heat of the early morning is an animal that needs to crawl up your leg and violate you. The stink of open cesspools doesn't attack you because you're accustomed to it. You put the sunglasses on that you paid too much to a street hawker for last night. You knew you would need them. Your body rebels and screams at the forced movement and heat. A purple, green, yellow, and blue canopied trike pulls alongside, and the driver says above the chainsaw noise,

"Main Gate 20P."

You say "10."

"15."

You scream, "10 DICKHEAD!"

"OK."

You think, "The stupid little bastard, I would have given him 25."

It is hard to set 227 pounds of revolting muscle into the tiny sidecar. A glance at your watch shows 0615. You curse yourself for setting the watch on military time. The motorcycle speeds through light traffic. Most people had the sense to go back earlier. The dingle balls around the edges of the canopy jerk wildly. The Jesus statue affixed in front of you goes toward horizontal in sudden twists.

The trike is not going toward the Main Gate. It has manuvered into some back alleys. You think, "God, this is a silly bastard. I outweigh him by 100 lbs." The driver stops and whips a butterfly knife under you're throat in the same movement. In the next fraction of a moment you take his wrist and break it. The driver was only able to cut you a little. The driver lays across the handlebars making gurgling noises and muffled shrieks. You pull him across you and onto the street, then slide up onto the seat. It is time to leave; the Philipino police *will* come.

The pass by the run down buildings, shacks, and naked children playing in dog offal pocked streets doesn't really affect you. That is what you tell yourself. Your head says you should have a beer before going back to the boat. 0700. You ditch the trike in a sewage trench and walk five paces into the nearest bar. The bars are ten paces apart for the next mile. The bar girls get up from their sleeping places, and one brings you a beer. You put 2p on the counter. A bar girl grabs your balls from behind, grinds her pubis into your ass and signs, "you big man, I take you up the ass." You say, "no thanks," swallowing the beer and asking for another. The bar girl hasn't let go or stopped grinding and says, "you faggy boy? I got tight ass!" Your elbow hits ribs under her arm, and you say at nearly level volume, "Get the fuck off me." Your nerves and body and mind are shredded and you are sick for having done it. The girl is only trying to make a living. You aren't thinking about it as the next swallow of beer hits your throat. The shakes, on top of a headache, and bad stomach; you wonder if you should have a pitcher of mojo. You can't remember if this place makes it right. A pint of local rum, a San Miguel, and then red fruit juice. The rattling decides. You order a pitcher.

0730 when you finish. Fifteen minutes to walk the mile to the gate and another three quarters of a mile to the boat. Shit, shit, shit. You try to sprint down the street, but your head and stomach make it a trot, then a slow walk. The meat venders are still cooking on grills of varied constructions. Slopping red sauce on the slivers of meat roasting on sticks. Their livestock is running around, barking, playing in the street with the ragged children. Black children, white children, and tan children; the U.S. presence over and over. The noise of the street finally hits. The Jeepneys honk and the music blares out of the bars. The meat smoke blends with exhaust, and the offal smell of Shit River three-hundred yards off.

0810 and you cross the bridge over Shit River. Girls stand in long, slender canoes anchored under the bridge. They wear white dresses. Flowers entwine their long black hair. Catholic girls for begging for money that will be given to the church, tax collectors, and then the rest will be used to eat. They will work on their backs in a year. None of the wilting virgins look over twelve years old. You throw a Peso coin into the river by one of the canoes. Two of the girls shed their dresses and dive. When they bob up, one holds the coin.

You are in the turnstile going into the Main Gate; you dig around in your pocket for I.D. There is only a line of four or five. Working hours have started and you are late. A Filipino Marine checks your card and waves you past. An American Marine stops you and motions you to the guard shack. Strip search. They do it at random; lot of contraban in the P.I. Entering the guard shack the sign says to place your valuables in the tray, enter the room, and disrobe. 1200. An I.D. and a crumpled pack of cigarettes dropped in the basket, you enter the first door, pull off shorts and shirt. Noticing that you smell of sex, cigarettes, beer, rum, and dog meat, you smile. The mojo is working yet. The marine guard comes in and says, "grab 'em." You bend over and

hold your ankles. The marine looks up your anus to make sure you're not smuggling a pound of reefer onto U.S. military installations. You are glad that you have had a touch of dysentery for a week.

0850 Leaving the Gate you pass the taxi stand, then go back to it. You realize that you have the first watch. 45 minutes late. You can't remember who the officer of the deck is going to be. You get in the first taxi and say "Creel DD-955 Bravo pier." The driver takes his time folding his paper and starting the Datsun. Then he peals out and starts at the pier. You pass the Exchange. You haven't bought a stereo yet, maybe tomorrow, or wait for Japan. Japan, hell. The CO has volunteered to chase the same non-existant typhoon-class sub three times. Much more sea time than necessary. Then the impossibly large WWII vintage warehouses speed by. The pier cranes. Activity everywhere. Fork lifts, trucks, buses, carts, cars, people, and sailors. Pass two gator freightors. You remember how huge and ominous the amphibious ships had looked to you once. Now, they are little more than more military horseshit. The cab stops at the foot of the gangway. The boat is a patchwork of red lead primer, and gleaming patches that have been chipped free of paint. Crates and palates of supplies crowd all around. Noise and motion everywhere. White hats and bell bottom dungarees. Machine gun clattering needle guns take off huge grey paint. Chief Petty officers yelling at everything. You whisper to yourself, "fuck the adventure." You pay for the ride and half-crawl up the gangway. The mid-morning heat dry humps you all the way. At the top of the gangway, you turn and stand at half-assed attention toward colors aft. Then you turn toward the petty officer of the deck. It's Tom Miller, and he was supposed to be relieved at 0745, and it is 0843. Miller is visibly pissed when you ask, "permission to come aboard."

He says, "You wonderfuck, I missed breakfast. Seventh fleet is coming, and Ensign Wilde has the deck. What the fuck happen to your neck?!"

You don't want to answer or stand or anything. The sun and heat make you queazy and the mojo has you drunk, and you can feel the shakes coming. You hear the bell on the next ship down the pier, "ding-ding, ding-ding, ding-ding, ding-ding." And over the ship's PA, "seventh fleet arriving." The admiral and his entourage will be coming toward Creel soon. Ensign Wilde struts out of the after pilot house. Three months out of the Academy and full of shit. Miller mutters, "oh shit", and says loudly "permission granted to come aboard, step over here and roll the dice." Miller hands you red die and you ask, "What's the number?" Ensign Wilde answers, "six, roll 'em Petty Officer Holt." Of course you roll six. Ensign Wilde pats you down and finds that you aren't carrying a kilo of coke in the folds of your sweaty T-shirt. The mouth of this twerpy little Ensign starts hammering, "Petty Officer Holt, you are one hour late! You have been fighting, you are drunk, and you have failed to relieve the watch. You are on report. You will stand the first and second watch, and I believe you will also have the mid-watch."

He continues at length with military gibberish about professionalism and duty. You want to spit on him but don't. The heat is reaching orgasm in its rape of your senses. You think you can hear it panting and grunting. Little white stars are forming in the corners of your eyes. You take a knee and try to catch your breath. That fucking Ensign is telling you to put on a uniform and get back to the quarterdeck fast. Shit on him. You throw up and some of the specks get on Ensign Motherfucker's shoes and you are pleased and the dagger of pain hits you from the inside out and you get up and spit on the deck and move with the shithead screaming at your back but it can get worse you tell yourself and you wonder what in the fuck you are doing and the shithead screams and you don't listen. Miller steps into the after pilot house, picks up the mike for the MC and announces, "Onboard the Creel — There are men working aloft on the USS Creel. Do not rotate or radiate any electronic equipment while men are working aloft." You know you will have to repeat that shit at fifteen minute intervals throughout the day.

You try to get a grip. Walking down the main passageway, you have to back up and turn around. Welders have it blocked. You have to climb ladders, and go out in the sun again, and over the block and inside and down two ladders to the berthing compartment. You feel bad and you discover that you have tracked through a coat of wax. Pettijohn comes down the ladder and yells. "Incredible shitface!" "I could have gone on liberty after the fucking wax dried, and you fucking walk in it." You flip him off and track toward your rack. Pettijohn yells some more and you pretend he doesn't exist. Opening your locker is difficult. You know you're in deep shit because you can't remember the combination to the three-year-old lock. You sit in the wax and hope the memory returns. Sudden anger. Barely able to see, you pound the locker, fist, fist, fist, fist, until someone who is also yelling (you are screaming) grabs you. Goddamn, Chief Day is holding you against the floor.

"Holt! Calm down son, shit, just calm down!" You reply death calm, "Alright, I'm alright Chief. I need to get my uniform; I'm late for the watch." He looks you over and looks at you like you are telling a huge lie. Both of you know you are.

"O.K. Holt, whatever. But you need to have those wounds looked after. That one on your neck looks bad. You probably broke your hand just now. Stay cool man, just be calm." Chief Day is only four years older than you; he is a good man, but a wimp. He lets you ride him because he isn't comfortable with you or his new rank.

"In this climate that shit can get dangerous. Get it taken care of o.k.?" You assume Pettijohn went to get this dumbass because of the wax. You want him to go away, so you say, "Yeah, I'll be alright. Had a rough night, sorry." The chief walks off without saying anything else.

The combination of the lock returns to you. The white you wore two days before on Shore Patrol are lying piled in the bottom of the locker. The dysentery you have been running has soiled the cotton bell bottoms. The jumper has blood on it from the brawl you stopped. The other set is in the laundry. You pull off the smelly shorts and shirt. You find a clean white T-shirt. The whites have gone stiff and smell sour but you put them on. The black shoes are scuffed

and dusty. You put the crunchy black socks on that you find in the shoes. Your only dixie cup is grey with wear. You put the hat on your head. The clip from your sea service ribbon is missing and the pin bites your chest. You feel worse than shit, but you go up the ladder out of the compartment.

You stop at the head to pee. You discover you need to empty your bowels. Brown water and blood, lovely. You take a large wad of toilet paper and put it in your pants so that nothing runs down your leg later. You notice a green spot in the front of your crusty boxers. You are in so much pain that you didn't notice the burning. You have the clap. "Better and better," you think. Moving toward the quarterdeck is close to hell. You want to lie down or jump overboard. At the quarterdeck you approach Ensign Wilde and ask, "Permission to relieve the watch?" Wilde says, "Yeah, don't fuck up on watch. You look like shit. You have another count on the report for it," "Thank you," you think. "You are an absolutely wonderfuckingful human being."

The messenger of the watch is hosing off the last of your vomit as you go to Miller and receive orders of the deck and take the .45. You break the gun and stick your little finger in the chamber to make sure there isn't a round in it, and it comes out with a rust stain band. The gun itself is rusty all over from long sea service. It might explode if actually fired. Miller says something. You salute each other and he leaves. You go repeat the message for men working aloft. When you come outside you feel the heat again. Ensign Wilde is signing for some supplies. You lean on the podium and wish the heat, the ship, and everything would go away. Somebody taps you on the shoulder. "Got the fuel and water reports man, you want 'em?" You say, "No" and put out your hand to take the pieces of paper.

0915, the mail comes onboard. Nobody has written you in six months because you haven't written in a year. You salute people coming onboard and walk around the quarterdeck, avoiding Ensign Wilde. He yells that seventh fleet is coming up the bow. You walk into the shack, take the mike, and pull the rope on the bell in four quick bursts of two.

"BING BING-BING BING-BING BING-BING BING!!!"

"Seventh fleet — Arriving."

You step outside to salute an admiral, two captains, and three commanders. They are smiling and businesslike. One of the commanders cuts a look that tells you that another article will appear on the report. Fuck him. The postal clerk comes up after they are gone and hands over a letter. Your mom sent a card for your 21st birthday. It is two weeks old. You can't believe you're only 21. Three years in this navy and feeling like ten-thousand. Mom has written that they are all proud of you, but to please write. You ball it up and throw it overboard.

Ensign Wilde walks over to the podium where you are busy preparing noon reports. He says you need help. You tell him to go away. He does, but not without informing you that you have a severe attitude problem. Ensign Wilde sends the messenger of the watch to present the noon reports. You are not in any condition to see the old man. You walk out to the edge of the fantail, covered in sweat that is drying, and reemerging. Looking forward toward the radar mast, you see men coming down. You try a couple of dry heaves, and get some blood in your mouth. You light a cigarette. You hurt too bad to be numb. You feel like crying. You grind the cigarette into the deck, having drawn once from it. Mike Gubbels walks up to Ensign Wilde and says something. Gubbels is in a bright orange safety harness. He was one of the men working aloft. You sit on a capstan. Gubbels comes over. He is your boss in division. You know you don't want to hear him.

"Holt, man you don't look good. You're going to take a lot of shit for this morning. I can't get you out this time. You have been fuckin' up too much." You don't say anything or even look at him. You have been drinking for a week solid. None of these shitheads are telling you anything. "Holt! You listening to me?!" You nod and stick your middle finger in his face. "OK, fuck you man, your on your own." He walks away, the safety line from his harness dangling from the back.

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1145 All the alcohol is gone from your system and you are rattling and sick. Ensign Wilde tells you to announce the watch and to secure men aloft. Lit. J. G. Meyer has already relieved Ensign Wilde. They have exchange opinions about the fuck-up that is the petty officer of the watch. Your piece of toilet paper is soak brown. Your eyeballs feel like they are orbiting in crushed glass and razor blades. The sun wants to melt you down for soap, and nobody comes within 5 feet of you because of the smell. You flash slow motion the young girls diving into a foul river. You are crying. Head hurts. You walk into the shack. "Onboard Creel — relieve the watch. Secure from men working aloft." Tears stream down your face. You think "I am ten-thousand years old." You take a 7 round magazine from the hip pouch of the gun belt. You grab the .45, jam the magazine in it. Pull back and release the slide. Forcing the barrel in your eye, you break the first rule of firing a weapon: you jerk the trigger, instead of squeezing it slowly.

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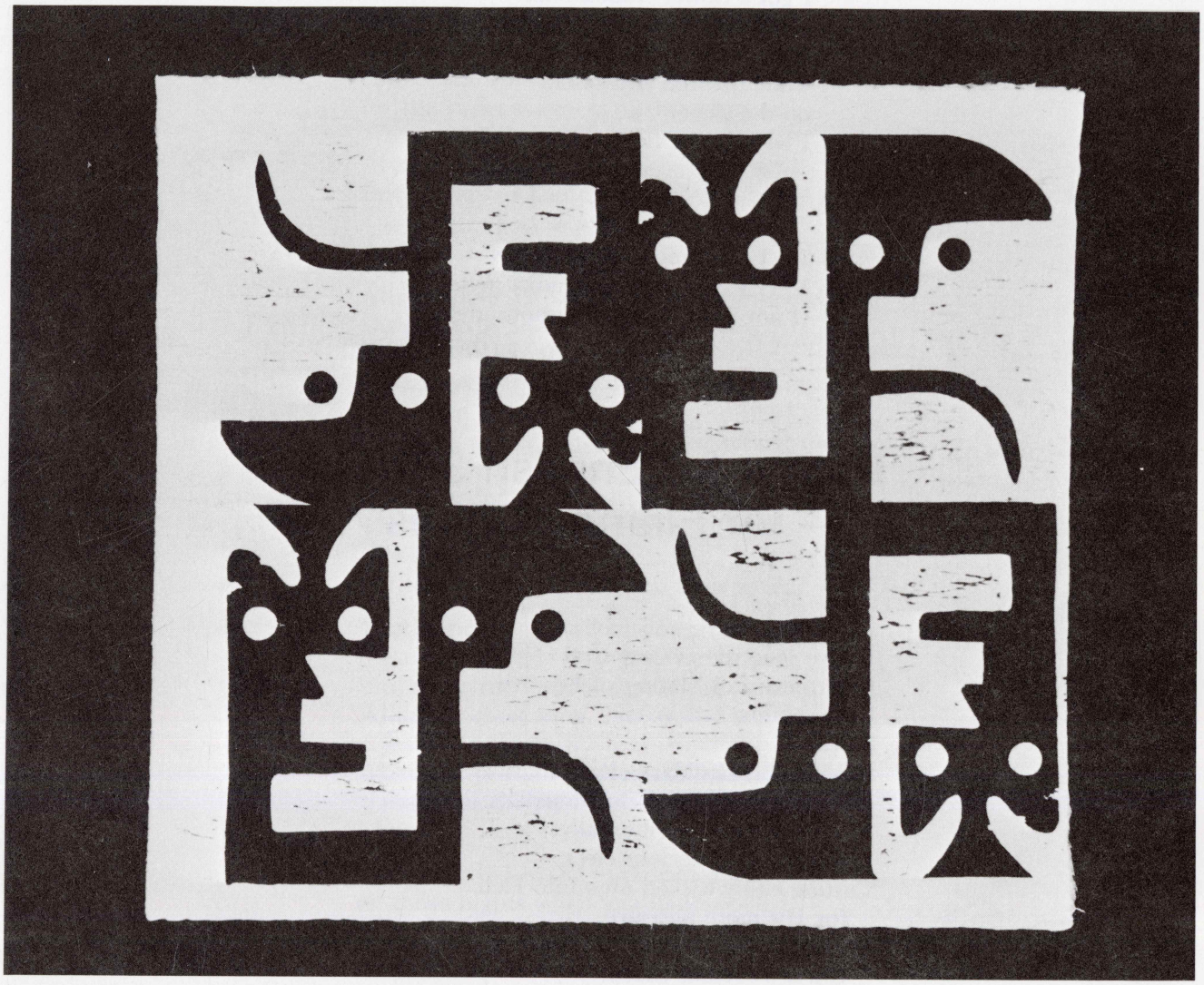
Winter Daniels is someone you don't want to know.



Cindy Holliday is a junior art major from Birmingham.

To My Inquisitive Friend — for AHS

I got a flower stoned once
I collect bones
And in the mornings
while the dew dries new
on the clover
I walk in the field alone

***

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)
— *Walt Whitman*

Theme for English 342 B — for Elaine Hughes

I

I have seen the gloomy God
of Bradford of Mather of Edwards
Riding high
Stern
Standing in His black-cloud chariot.
His right eye turned earthward;
His just ear cocked eternally,
Counting His precious elect,
Casting easily wicked men into Hell
for His mere pleasure,
Driving so few skyward to Glory in
Christ's curious coach,
Missing some few not in, travelers afoot,
Of whom I am one.

II

In suburban Homewood, Alabama,
I lay on the bank of the drainage ditch
I named Crawfish Creek for the tiny
purple pinchers
I pulled from the shallow stream in empty pop
cans punched with fishnet holes.
I imagined those tiny crayfish five-pound
channel cats
Hooked on mile-long trotlines.

The silty sediment of Crawfish Creek formed my
Big Muddy.
And in my dull summer dreams
I'd raft to New Orleans
with Fat Johnny, the black Buddha handyman,
acting as my runaway.

When Dad would whistle I'd awake
And run home from the ditch.
And Mom would smell my breath
for the sweet staleness of cigarettes and
sour mash,
Although I was only nine.
But her father had died that year from
cigarettes and sour mash,
And I was her only son.

After supper I'd lay on the cool summer lawn,
gazing at the suburban tract houses,
each nearly like the next one.
Near dusk fathers would rise from their
evening papers,
Cranking power mowers and marching the weekly
march
from one end of the yard to the other.
The grass neatly trimmed, they'd retire
to the den
For television and time with their wives.

That same year I walked down the aisle of
Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church,
Professing my faith in something unseen
While the choir sang, "Softly and tenderly
Jesus is calling . . . "
When the preacher raised me from the cold
waters of the tile-lined baptismal
I knew I'd been reborn.

And Jesus hid in the darkened ditch
on those nights when temptation called.
And the Holy Spirit slept in the back of
the Greyhound bus
on his freedom ride from Bethlehem to
Birmingham.
And God flung fire each Sunday from the pulpit
of Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church.

III

Hiking the stoney trail of Little River Canyon,
I cast my eyes skyward to its rocky rim
And called the name of God.
And the silver trees answered,
"I am He whom you seek."
And the river whispered,
"Come, drink of My well."

And the golden wildflowers sang,
"Knock and the door will open."
And the songbirds chirped,
"I am the way and the truth and the light."
And a voice inside me said,
"I am you and you are Me."

IV

In the white-hot furnaces of the
Fairfield Works
God beckoned, "Come."
In the February frost of the slab-floored
warehouse
God beckoned, "Come."
In the red dirt sweat of the soybean field
God beckoned, "Come."
In the metallic clang of the machine room
God beckoned, "Come."
In the greased-air kitchen of the
fast food joint
God beckoned, "Come."
In the check-out line of the suburban
supermarket
God beckoned, "Come."
In the bright sterile hum of the hospital ward
God beckoned, "Come."
In the aisles among files in the federal
office building
God beckoned, "Come."

V

I have crossed unknown seas
with seekers of light.

I have tamed a wild country
and dined on shellfish and corn.

I have dangled over the pit of Hell
for Someone's perverse pleasure.

I have stood on a Boston scaffold at midnight
and learned of true love's ways.

I have signed freedom's document
while holding slaves.

I have played ninepins with elves
in New York's fairy mountains.

I have drowned in the Flood of Years
poured by a mighty hand
from an exhaustless jar.

I have kissed the cold blue lips of Madeline
and slept still with the mournful burden
upon tressels
in the damp, dark donjon-keep.

I have swung from the yardarm of the
Bellipotent
with Claggart's cruel vengeance
clenched tight between my teeth.

I have loosed the chains of bondage
while the cannon rang freedom
in low Pennsylvanian vales.

I have strolled the starry streets of
Schenectady
with a pretty American flirt.

I have shivered starving in a trackless sea
of white
as the grey smoke of Poker Flat rose
in the clear winter air.

I have beat the dark-finned demon
then slept face down in the sandy shallows
while the seven gods of the sea stood laughing
on the shore.

I have fought for my life in Rum Alley
and swum alone in the oily waters
off Devil's Row.

I have worshipped the Dollar, Dove, and Eagle
on steel altars tall enough to blind.

I have cursed the stifling darkness of a
steamer's bowels
and gone unheard on the stylish sidewalks of
Fifth Avenue.

I have heard the bare-armed snickers as I hung
pinned and wriggling on the wall.

I have felt their bloody bayonets
roasted hot with heat.

I have stood in Paris snowstorms
pounding on the door.

I have stilled the charging lion,
made quiet his throaty roar.

I have dug Sonny's blues
in purple Village vaults.

I have jazzed June
under yellow suburban light.

I have ridden cross-country in a '49 Hudson
Dean and Sal speeding drunk,
taking turns behind the wheel.

I have heard the pierced ear rumble
of a rock 'n' roll dream dissolved.

I have tripped with Billy Pilgrim
in the blazing Dresden dawn.

I have fished bemused in a three-cornered hat
with the Andrew Carnegie of trout.

I have tasted the straw-blond heat
of Holiday Golightly
in Apartment Number Two.

I have shrunk like Henry Jones
between Sarah's savage thighs.

I have lived a quiet life at Mike's Place
among the green dollar bills
and the French pinball addicts.

I have crossed the street to Lee Chong's
for five quarts of beer.

I have dragged myself through Negro streets
at dawn
looking for an angry fix.

But I have never seen
the face of God.

VI

Among the golden weeds of Wilderwood
I sleep with ghosts
And the roll call of the dead
Pierces the cruel night:

Mike?
Here.
Bill?
Here.
John?
Here.
Jim?
Here.
Tracey?
Here.
Doc?
Here.
Teresa?
Here.

My name is not called
So I do not answer.
I live.
But their spirits
echo truth.
And I can not hear them.
They are so far away.

And they do not return my calls.
And they will not answer my letters.
And they never open the door,
Although I stand and knock.

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The Longest Night

The chill November wind tumbled down the brick Parisian street, tearing the remainder of the scarlet leaves from the bare trees and sending them dancing along the road. It grasped the manes and tails of the carriage horses which trotted along in the later afternoon light and left them streaming behind like tattered banners; it engulfed Edouard's long black cloak, sending it swirling around his slender form as he hurried home.

Twilight fell quickly at this time of year, and the gas street-lamps were already lit when the enormous stone house came into sight. Edouard shivered involuntarily; during the day it possessed a certain dignity, but at nightfall took on a sort of eerie magnificence. It was gothic in style, situated behind a tall stone wall. Its three story body sprouted several spires reaching toward heaven, heavily ornate windows, and a balcony which ran the length of the third floor. An octagonal chapel soared well above the remainder of the house, complete with a large oriel window and elaborate parapet on the roof, towering four stories above the cobblestone courtyard.

Edouard walked briskly through the gate, across the cobbled yard and up the shallow steps to the front door. It was dark and empty inside; the servants had been let go several months ago when the first signs of the illness manifested themselves. His entire childhood had been a continuous state of flux between dread at falling prey to the same madness which eventually killed his father, uncle, and grandfather, and youthful confidence that he would be spared.

He walked through the large mansion, slowly lighting the lamps. When the interior was glowing rosily he retired to the richly-panelled study and touched a long match to the already laid fire. Soon the flames were leaping brightly against the stone, casting otherworldly shadows on Edouard's face. He leaned back wearily in the brocaded chair, pushing a dark curl away from his forehead. He was still a young man, having only reached his early thirties, but the rapid progression of the degenerative disease had wasted him.

A spasm of pain ripped through his body then was gone as swiftly as it had come. Another followed a moment later. Despair settled quietly over him; the madness would come again tonight, he was quite sure. Sometimes days would pass without it manifesting itself, and it was during these times that he could convince himself that his life was still worth living. However, the pain was an accurate barometer, and it promised a long and painful evening this clear November night.

As he waited with a sort of resigned compliance for the blinding lights inside his weakening brain which would signify a coming attack, he wondered if he had done the right thing by isolating himself, from strangers, from those he loved, from humanity itself. He both craved comfort and support and dreaded the reaction his condition would provoke. If only Phillippe were here . . .

Philippe. This pained him far worse than anything the illness could do to his body. It was his presence he longed for most and dreaded above all else. He should never have to see Edouard like this; he wanted the memories to reflect the joy they had shared, not pain and suffering that could not be helped, or even made bearable. It was for this reason that he had driven him away, and for this reason that he hated the disease most.

A million flashes of light began to explode inside his head. It was coming. Edouard cradled his head in his hands, rocking back and forth with the pain. The room swirled around him. He struggled to sit upright and reached for the bottle of cognac on the table beside him. Perhaps it would dim the lights which burned brightly behind his eyes. His hand shook violently as he poured the drink into a cut-crystal glass and recorked the bottle. As he lifted the glass to his mouth, the firelight caught the liquid and transformed it into an infinite prism through the crystal. The sparkle of the erratic dance of the flames dazed him.

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The bright lights of the ballroom, reflected and refracted through dozens of crystal chandeliers, dazzled him. Around him gowned bodies whirled, faster and faster, in perfect synchronicity; taffeta rustling and jeweled slippers whispering across the marble floor. Images from the great mirrors mingled with reality; doubling, trippling the chaotic precision of the dance. In the midst of the sensual maelstrom his eyes rested grateful on the one immobile focal point of the room. As he took in her alabaster skin against the indigo velvet of her gown, and her curtain of black hair, he felt his body tighten involuntarily. Without being aware of moving, he found himself in front of her.

The panelled door of his study closed gently behind them. Silently he held out his hand to her. On the mantle, engulfed in the flickering shadows of the fire, a baroque clock ticked off the long seconds as she hesitated, a slender hand brushing a capricious curl back from her face. For an apprehensive moment, the noise of the ballroom, so close, yet so removed, rose perceptibly then faded from his consciousness as she slowly stepped into his arms. He kissed her then, revelling in the warm friction of her perfumed skin against his lips.

She released the pins which held her hair and it tumbled into a riotous mass of curls about her shoulders. He buried his face in the black strands for a moment before allowing his mouth to travel down her neck to the exposed area above her decolletage. His slightly unsteady hands had just moved to the intricate system of hooks binding the gown when she stiffened warily. At the same instant, he became aware of a slight change in temperature in the enclosed room. A light breeze travelled across his heated body. Reluctantly he raised his head to the door and tensed as he

saw the motionless figure standing there.

But it was only Philippe, his stance stiff and proud to disguise the hurt and betrayal he felt. Edouard relaxed and moved to his side, bidding the confused girl to remain where she was. He put arm around him, and spoke softly for several minutes. Philippe nodded and allowed himself to be led to the fireplace.

He traced his fingers softly over Philippe's face, over the taut smoothness of his cheek and the roughness of his strong jawline. Her face was less a tapestry of texture, but no less sensual. Amid the flickering firelight they sunk to the rich Persian carpet, hands reaching for buttons, hair, and flesh. Body upon body upon body they lay; deliriously intertwined, while the light danced about them, and the distant music rose and fell.

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The flashback ended abruptly and Edouard slumped backwards into the chair with a low moan of despair. The hallucinations were getting worse, both in frequency and intensity. They were always those incidents best forgotten, for the memories brought with them a longing to slip back into a past so intense that it could scarcely be borne. Though it had been years ago, Edouard could clearly remember the sensual chaos of the ballroom, the light smell of the girl's perfume, and feel of Philippe's roughened jaw under his hand.

Edouard stood up wearily to remove the scene from his mind. The attacks always left him drained, and he had little energy to fight the memories with anymore. The needle-like sensation in his brain remained, reminding him that there would be no respite from the attacks this evening. With a sigh he walked out of the study and into the more open salon. Away from the fire, the air was much cooler, and he rested his overheated face against the cold glass of a window. Outside, overhead, the stars twinkled brilliantly, and he gave an exclamation of mild surprise to discover how much time had passed.

Beyond the wall a merchant's wagon rolled slowly by, its wheels creaking loudly with each revolution. The lights flared up brightly inside Edouard's head once more, and he gripped the windowframe tightly to keep from falling.

— —

The small village was bustling with preparations for All Saints Day. Young Edouard watched in rapt attention as the public square was readied for his family's appearance. As the local aristocracy, their presence at the ceremonies was imperative. He waved happily at the priest who strolled by, carrying candles for the religious services. Tomorrow they would be the central focus, but today — this was a time for feasting, music, and dancing. His mother disapproved. "It's nothing but a pagan celebration, especially falling as it does on the day before The Feast of All Saints." Edouard disagreed; he had little use at fourteen for the honoring of the dead, but the more secular activities quickened his heart with boyish excitment.

A rowdy commotion at the other end of the village caught Edouard's attention. Unable to ascertain its cause from the square, he dashed swiftly to join the crowd. Craning his neck to see over the shoulders of the other townspeople, he caught sight of a large wagon approaching from the east. "What is it?" he asked a burly man next to him.

"An acting troupe," he replied. "Probably from Italy."

Edouard felt excitement course through his body. He had heard stories, of course, of the Commedia del'arte troupes who travelled from town to town, performing their scenes in the squares, but had never seen one. His village, after all, was very small.

A large following trailed after the wagon, waving and shouting to the players. They rolled down the cobbled streets until they reached the open, grassy area at the center of the town. There a makeshift stage had been set up. Edouard saw seven men and three women emerge, all of whom helped to prepare the sight for the performance. One of the women, noticing his fascinated attention, smiled flirtatiously at him as she carried an armful of costumes from the wagon. He moved forward, intent on speaking with her, questioning her of the world and people she must have seen, when a heavy hand descended upon his slender shoulder. It was his eldest brother.

"Come," he said, "They're nothing but a band of rogues." None too gently he marched Edouard out of the square toward the carriage, ignoring his impassioned pleas to remain. When they were seated in the carriage, Lucien took pity on the young boy and explained, "They are outcasts. The church condemns them and those that watch the heresy they put on."

"How can something that gives so many pleasure be bad?" Edouard murmured. His brother shot him an odd glance.

"There are many things which seem enjoyable. That is the way of sin."

Edouard said no more as the carriage headed out of town. Before they had travelled several minutes they suffered a tremendous jolt and horses came to a shuddering halt. Lucien quickly climbed out to see what happened. The boy heard the driver tell him that the wheel base had snapped.

Recognizing his chance, Edouard quickly slipped from the coach and raced back to town.

Fearing that his brother would discover his disappearance too soon, he promptly lost himself in the crowd. The players had only just begun.

They performed without scenery. Costumes were used to differentiate between the types of characters: only the young lovers wore the clothes of the day. The others, the Capitano, loud and a coward at heart; Pantalone, a middle-aged merchant; the Dottore — a pedantic scholar; and Arlecchino, a mixture of cunning and stupidity, and an accomplished acrobat, wore elaborate costumes and masks.

Edouard watched in fascination as the drama unfolded. They worked, not from a script, but by playing off each other, giving an irresistible spontaneity to the scene. There were speeches, songs, dances, mimes, and acrobatics. For the first time in his life he felt the overwhelming certainty

that this was what he wanted to do. He longed to be up on the crude stage, singing to the beautiful young girl, cavorting with Arlecchino. They possessed a beauty, a freedom that he had only longed for, yet never experienced.

The sun had begun to disappear over the western horizon when the troupe finally disassembled their equipment. Edouard, after making sure Lucien was not nearby, presented himself at their wagon. "I want to go with you," he announced. "Please take me. I promise that I will learn quickly."

The actors exchanged looks among themselves, then a kindly-looking man stepped forward and put his hand on Edouard's shoulder. "How old are you" he asked gently.

Edouard drew himself up to his full height before sheepishly admitting that he was only fourteen. "But I'm sure that I could pass for someone older," he pleaded.

The man smiled. "I'm sure you could, and I'm sure that we could use you." He paused. "However, to be successful at acting you really need some personal experience to call upon. I think you should give yourself a few years to acquire that experience, then come find us."

Edouard felt an enormous wave of disappointment wash over him. He tried once more, "Couldn't I just help set up, or carry buckets, or anything?"

The man smiled once more. "Don't ever settle for less than what you passionately desire," and then he was gone. From behind the wagon strode Lucien.

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Edouard turned resignedly to meet his brother, but found only the cold panes of a window, now etched lightly with tendrils of frost about the edges. As he struggled to readjust to reality he glanced down at his hands. They were curled so tightly around the edge of the window that he could no longer move them.

As fear and desperation threatened to overpower him; alone, and slowly drifting toward madness in the great, empty house, he sought refuge in a place he had not visited for many years.

The door to the small, octagonal chapel was difficult to open, having remained shut to even the servants. It took all of Edouard's failing strength to move it. The interior was coated with a fine layer of dust, and a rat scampered across the floor, disturbed by human presence for the first time.

Edouard advanced slowly, feeling a lifetime of religious emotions wash over him. Fear was there, and piety, and disgust. He wondered idly which of those would defeat the others within him for possession of his soul. He sat down in the elaborately carved pew and studied the ornate rose window which collected daylight and hurled it back in a kaleidoscope of colors, but at night only distorted and confused the city lights which happened to be caught within its boundaries. As always, its beauty, the perfect example of humanity's capability for the creation of art, stunned him. There was a time, though, when that beauty only confused him, angered him. Why should it be that the only true form of mortality lies in one's creations? Tonight the thought of immortality comforted him. The fear of his impending death had driven him back to this room, and he found the symbiotic relation between God and man evident there to be reassuring.

For his death would come soon. Of this he had little doubt, based both on family history and personal intuition. It would be painful as well, as the disease disintegrated his body and mind. He wished, now, that he could speed up the course of its progress, or end his life himself, tempering the inevitable with some dignity which he still retained. Edouard doubted that he could remain sane for much longer, but lacked the final disregard for life which would aid him in taking his destiny into his own hands.

"Please give me strength," he breathed softly to no one in particular. A bolt of pain raced through his body and he paled, clutching the pew momentarily, before he was able to continue. "Please . . . " He was about to finish his plea when it occurred to him that he did not know what he was asking for. For the madness to disappear? No, that would be ridiculous. For help in withstanding the pain? He had no choice but to withstand it. What then? Eternal salvation? It was far too late to make amends for his digressions into sin, and he would have to be sorry, anyway. Edouard could never feel regret for his life. What he had done was right for him.

The madness dug in deeper, then, and he watched as the chapel walls undulated softly, then more violently, and finally collapsed inwards. They crashed to the ground in ruin. The rose window was the last to fall, balancing precariously for several eternal moments before toppling and scattering brightly — colored daggers of glass about the rubble.

"No!" Edouard screamed, and clapped his hands to his ears as the crimson sound waves penetrated his head. The chapel righted itself. Shakily he made his way to the altar and leaned against it. The cool marble caressed his skin. He tried to concentrate on that instead of the barrage of lights . . .

It was late morning when he approached the cathedral, glancing apprehensively at the towering edifice which occupied much of the block. Its gothic spires reached piously toward heaven at the same time its flying buttresses anchored it firmly to earth. The sheer scope of its religious ostentation was guaranteed to strike holy terror into the hearts of even the most devout.

He opened a forgotten side door and entered the dark interior. Slowly, his shoes clicking methodically on the stone floor he walked down the nave toward the central altar. Light streamed in through the enormous stained glass window behind him, casting infinite patterns of color onto the floor. As he waded through the transparent mosaic, they clung brilliantly to his clothes before retreating once again to the stone in his wake.

Ahead, a robed priest appeared from behind the altar. Edouard's already tense body reacted before he had time to think, and he ducked swiftly into one of the darkened cloisters along the side of the nave. Berating himself for acting so guiltily, he nonetheless allowed the shadows to engulf his pale face as the man walked by.

Once the aisle was clear he resumed his journey. He

reached the more open transept, and skirted around the perimeter, keeping clear of both the lofty, vaulted choir area and the majestic, ornate altar. At the very head of the cathedral lay a cluster of circular chapels, each enclosed, each with individual alters. More quickly now, he by-passed the first four and silently opened the door of the last. He slipped inside and gently closed the wooden door behind him.

The chapel, though it appeared round, was actually octagonally shaped. The three outermost walls had long screens of stained glass windows. They were arched, with intricate iron work decorating the tops. The ceiling, lower than the main area of the church, was still imposing; its gothic vaulting forming a heaven-like dome over the room.

Edouard quickly scanned the interior, then pulled a pocketwatch out of his coat, checking the time. He was just backing toward the door, his confidence deteriorating rapidly, when he heard a light footstep at the rear of the chapel. A tall slender young man stepped out from behind the marble altar. The morning sunlight backlit him, giving the disconcerting image of a nimbus surrounding his silhouette. Already on edge, Edouard could only stare in helpless fascination until he moved out of the light. The movement served to break the spell; simultaneously they moved into each other's arms.

"I was beginning to think you weren't coming," Philippe murmured in his low, singsong French as he gently stroked Edouard's dark hair.

"Never doubt me," Edouard responded huskily.

They kissed, standing alone in the deserted chapel, their young bodies illuminated in the prismatic patterns cast by the windows. Finally, their longing grew enormous in the small room, and they slowly moved backwards until Edouard's back was against the altar. Philippe knelt then on the cold stone floor, and his cool hands and lips found heated flesh. Gradually, languorously, Edouard's head fell back onto the marble of the holy altar, and the light burned his eyes.

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He slowly raised a hand to block the brilliant rays of sun, only to discover that he had been staring into the flickering light of a candelabra. Edouard quickly pushed himself away from the altar, and fell gratefully into the pew again as the room spun gracefully, the earth tilting swiftly on its axis.

He moaned then, and his head dropped down to his hands. Suddenly, without warning the motion ceased, and Edouard warily looked about the chapel. It appeared normal, but he was beginning to doubt his ability to judge that condition. Cautiously, in case the visions returned, he began to inch his way toward the heavy wooden door.

The footsteps became audible just as his hand touched the handle. They came from a great distance away, walking ever closer, their cadence slow and regular. Edouard felt his body tense, but refused to turn around. Even when the steps seemed directly behind him he maintained his position, his knuckles white from gripping the door in a feeble attempt at self-preservation.

"Edouard." The soft, loving timbre of the voice chilled the room — Philippe's voice. Edouard's dazed senses leapt with joy. Philippe had returned! He had not allowed himself to be banished from Edouard's crumbling world.

He whirled around, a smile lighting his weary features, then fading quickly as he surveyed the dark form. It was Philippe, but at the same time it was not. The fine, chiselled face, auburn hair, and slender build were his, but his . . . creation lacked the essential life and expression which defined him.

"Who are you?" he asked defeatedly.

"Don't you know me?" the creature responded.

"You're not Philippe."

"Of course I am. I'm him, at least. I'm in everyone and they're in me."

"What do you want?" Edouard asked, drawing his coat tightly around himself.

"You," the Not-Philippe answered. "It's time to go."

Edouard's eyes widened with fear, and he backed away. The creature followed. "Why do you run?" it queried. "You always knew what your ultimate existence would be. It was a choice you made long ago. Your life was led in accordance with my patterns of eternity."

"My life hasn't been sin," Edouard responded deperately, meeting the dark gaze of the form for the first time.

"Of course it hasn't," it said soothingly. "But you did choose a path in life, and once committed to it you must follow it to the end.

"And the end is here?"

It nodded. "You must come with me." His hand extended from the depths of the black cloak, its very innocence and familiarity giving it the most sinister of appearances. Slowly, trance-like, Edouard reached to meet it. It was only when his hand brushed the coldness of the other that realization returned to his foggy mind.

"No!" he cried, violently jerking his hand away. The creature grabbed for it but closed on nothing but air. Edouard sunk away, covering his eyes, but was unable to blot out the unearthly, rapidly fading cry of rage which resounded from the walls of the chapel.

Several minutes later, after straining his ears for any sound in the room, Edouard cautiously turned around. The chapel was empty. He sighed in relief. It was only as he was leaving that he saw the altar. A wide crack had slit it down the middle.

Edouard quickly ascended the curving staircase, ignoring the rolling motion of the steps. His head was pounding now in a vigorous tempo, and the walls seemed to close in around him. Almost frantically he stumbled into the ballroom and flung open the French doors leading to the balcony. Fresh, cold air flooded over his heated body. He breathed in deeply, trying to erase the scene from his mind.

Above him the sky twinkled brilliantly. Edouard tilted his head back to admire the heavens, clearing his tormented mind of everything but the beauty. As he watched, one star began to increase in brightness until its radiance overshadowed the nighttime sky. Beams of light were released, creating a flaming nimbus around the star. Slowly, one of these beams approached the earth, leaving a trail of molten

gold behind. As it neared him, Edouard could see that it was not solid but rather tiny particles of light which danced and whirled to an unheard music.

The shimmering beam descended to the balcony and slowly began to solidify and take on form. Edouard could only look on in amazement. Suddenly the light had become a translucent figure with flowing robes and a faint aura enveloping it. It spoke to him then, though he could not say how, for no sounds were uttered.

"Do you know what I am?" it asked.

Suddenly Edouard did know. "You're a cherubim," he answered. "An order of angels."

The cherubim shimmered its approval. "Why are you here?" Edouard asked. This time the creature's disbelief washed over them.

"Don't you know?" he asked. "Are you aware of what went on tonight? Do you take it lightly?"

Helplessly Edouard pressed his hands to his aching head and bitterly cursed the madness. He turned his back on the cherubim then, hoping to destroy its power in the same way he had dealt with the dark visitor.

"Edouard," the cherubim thought gently, "you must face this. A decision must be made."

"I'm dying, aren't I?" Edouard thought desperately. "That's why you're here."

The cheribum didn't deny this. "By turning away the darkness that you have has placed yourself and us in an awkward position."

"You mean that I was supposed to go with him?" Edouard demanded. "Have I been damned?"

The shimmer became agitated. "It's not that simple. Your actions have not been exemplary during your time in this realm, but you are certainly not purely evil.

Edouard moaned, and the blinding lights flashed behind his eyes. "What do you want from me? My life is over and nothing can be changed. Besides, I would not change it if I could."

The cherubim glistened excitedly. "We're not asking you to revise the past."

"What do you want me to do?" he asked, leaning lethargically against the cool stone of the wall.

"What are you willing to do?" the cherubim queried.

Edouard sighed wearily. "I don't want to go the hell. I just want this madness to end."

"That's all you have to want," responded the cherubim, satisfied. "Just come with us, show your faith."

Edouard pushed open the heavy door to the wine cellar and descended the narrow steps. Cobwebs and dust hung heavy in the thick air, and a large rat dashed quickly across the stone floor to take refuge across the cobblestones. He passed quickly through the labyrinth of oak barrels and soon reached a much smaller door set inconspicuously in a murky corner. There he hesitated for a moment, looking around wistfully as if to memorize the surroundings and commit the atmosphere to memory. However, some thought or goal nudged him then, for he broke his revelry and gave the door a violent push.

It swung back protestingly on its rusted hinges, squeaking loudly in the silence. The passageway beyond was no more than a dark hole, more resembling a rabbit warren than a corridor. Eduoard lit the small gas lamp he carried and descended into the tunnel.

He picked his way purposefully along the damp stone floor, ignoring the bloodied corpses hanging crucified along the narrow walls. They moaned gently to Edouard in a mournful chorus, and extended their fingers in lethargic appeal, but he kept his gaze straight ahead. As he began to come across intersections in the dark gloomy passage, he mentally kept count. At the third he turned right and carefully eased down some more steps. The catacombs loomed ahead, the imposing marble structures giving off both eerie dignity and the pervasive odor of death and decay. There existed over two miles of these twisting corridors under the city, having served as a private burial ground centuries before. Edouard stood motionless in the open space, watching silently and without expression as a coven of black-robed priests circled slowly in front of him. From somewhere came the somber rhythm of a Gregorian chant. His determination almost left him then, as fear crept surreptitiously through the blinding flashes of light which paralyzed his mind to rational thought. He was backing slowly into the tunnel from which he had just emerged when the words of the chant penetrated his conscious. "Sin, sin, sin," it repeated, never varying in tone or volume. Soon the pattern was driving into Edouard's brain like a white-hot probe and he staggered against the damp wall, his hands pressed against his ears.

"No," he cried helplessly.

"You haved sinned," they intoned solemnly.

"I've been happy," he protested wearily. "I haven't done anything wrong."

"Wrong," came the answer. "Your life has been a sin. You must repent." Edouard didn't respond to this. "To be blessed you must see your sins, and be sorry for them." They paused and then queried, "Are you sorry?"

"Yes!" sobbed Edouard helplessly. "I'm sorry. Just don't leave me alone!"

When he woke the entranceway to the catacombs was empty. Painfully he struggled to his feet and turned around several times to get his bearings. This accomplished, he set off down the easternmost corridor. Sealed tombs towered over him on both sides, and the lamp created flickering images against the marble. The blinding lights came again, and the crypts swung alarmingly about him, but he walked on resolutely.

The gas lamps in the small salon were dimmed until the only illumination came from the flickering tapers in the bronzed candelabra. The smooth surfaces of the members' faces became planes of shadow and light which varied eerily with the motion of the flame. Madame Chloe, resplendent in her scarlet robes, motioned dreamatically and all grasped hands, forming a human chain about the mahogany table. Monsieur Dumas' hand was clammy in Edouard's. He thought briefly of Philippe's warmth, then mentally shook himself. The society had no place for disbelievers and he must not weaken the power by thinking of one. Not now.

"Why concern yourself with those who no longer exist?" Philippe had wanted to know. "The world is inhabited by

the living. It is they you must deal with."

What Philippe could not know was the tangible aura of energy which filled the room, the exhilaration felt at transcending this world for another, one inhabited by those who possess an entirely different view of the universe.

Edouard, along with the other members, closed his eyes and concentrated on dissolving the barrier between the planes of existence. Madame Chloe's low incantations filled his ears and took on a tangible shape and color as they rose and fell in the small room. His head whirled; his thoughts lost concrete form and became only blue undulations. At Madame's command they opened their eyes but remained powerless to break the trance which enveloped the room.

At the center of the table rested a large crystal sphere. Madame's gnarled hands grasped it reverently, her head thrown back. Her humming increased in pitch and volume until she threw herself forward to stare deeply into the ball. The society leaned forward as one to do the same. Edouard blinked rapidly to focus his eyes. There was a swirling mist in the very heart of the sphere.

Slowly the fog within began to gather itself into a solid shape. Edouard's world, already restricted to the small room, narrowed again, reduced to only the small spherical passageway to the beyond. He was transfixed, unable to move. Looking deep into the very midst within. He was speeding out of control, racing at enormous speeds toward a planet. He could see it clearly, a great world suspended in space, which he hurtled toward like a falling star. The clouds above the earth parted to allow him to pass, and he descended toward the rooftops of Paris. It was Philippe's house he approached. There was the balcony where they had watched the heavens twinkle above at night; there was the window where they had watched the city come alive in the mornings. And there was Philippe, writhing alone on his bed, gripped by some unknown illness. Edouard could only watch helplessly as he coughed violently, desperately for air. The sound of choking filled his senses. Suddenly Edouard realized Philippe was not alone in the room. There was a shadow figure standing by his bed, watching silently as he struggled for life. Edouard understood that it was he, and that he was dead. Philippe was evil — the unbeliever. It was only through his own death that he could come to understand the true nature of the universe as Edouard and the other enlightened ones did. The spectral figure of Edouard moved in closer as Philippe's breathing was blocked entirely. His lover's dark, scared eyes opened then and seemed to look beseechingly up at his horrified audience of one.

"No!" the watching Edouard moaned. "Not Philippe!" with enormous effort he wrenched his gaze away from the crystalline horrors. The images still vivid in his mind's eye, he leapt up and reached for the sphere. He hurled it through the air and watched in satisfaction as it shattered into a million daggers against the fireplace. "No," he said again.

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Blood ran freely down his arm and he looked around in surprise. The gaslamp light lay splintered on the stone. Edouard smiled to himself. "It was a sin," he murmured softly. "I'm so sorry."

He began to run then, stumbling in the dark, recovering his balance, guided himself instinctively. Around him, swelling magnificently among the tombs, was the voice of a thousand souls. It rose and fell with the cadence of his steps and lingered in the slight breeze which had blown up in the tunnel. He was almost there. Back up more steps now and the wind is getting stronger. The smell of decay is replaced with the one of dampness and the odor of flowing water.

Around a final corner and there lies the river, low now, lapping at the bottom of the slimy steps which lead to it. Edouard pulled a beautifully-worked iron chain from his cloak as the voices rose to a crescendo. Carefully he descended the steps, watching with satisfaction as the murky water engulfed his ankles, calves, knees, and thighs.

The watergate, too, was slimy with the passage of millions of gallons of water. It was a wooden lattice, providing both protection and access to the outside world. On Edouard's side was the shadowy world of the catacombs; on the other the river wound its way out into the city. It was to this barrier that he chained himself, his mind at peace for the first time in many months. Behind the gate the sky was beginning to lighten a bit. He wouldn't have long to wait. His hand fell back against the wood as the water flowed gently now around his waist.

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The party was still loud and boisterous, but the pace was definitely slowing. After surveying the situation briefly Edouard excused himself, meeting Philippe's dark gaze as he rose from the Turkish rug. His lover nodded approvingly.

He retreated to the study where he searched quickly through the collection of cut-glass decanters sitting next to the fireplace. The various colors of the liquids greedily absorbed the surrounding light and hurled it back at Edouard. His eyes were filled with the shimmering hues of amber, mahogany, carmine, claret, aquamarine, saffron, amethyst, and cerulean. Finding the one he needed, he balanced it and eight crystal glasses on a filigreed gold tray and re-entered the salon. His guests looked up expectantly and, recognizing the liquid, gathered quickly around.

The hallucinogen flowed freely, working swiftly to brighten perception and lower inhibitions. Suddenly Philippe leapt up from the gilded chair he had been seated in and announced, "Hide-and-seek for everyone! Edouard will hunt for us."

The four winds enter the salon and carry them away. Skirts swirl above the floor — taffeta tornadoes. Then nothingness. The walls ripple back and forth, slowly and methodically. I focus my entire attention on them, then remember my quest. To seek them out. They hide in my closets. In my cellar. The staircase, rising unbidden to heaven. Have they ascended? Are they worthy? Am I worthy to follow? The first step looms high above me. My

floor won't reach its lofty heights. Eternal journey to the top. Looking down, the floor below rushes up to meet me, each gray marble square etched with a long-forgotten face. Papa is there. A great rolling sound echoes down the corridor, bouncing off the walls in visible scarlet waves. I pursue. Doors. Endless variety; sizes, shapes, colors. Large one emits sound waves. I grasp the door knob and the cold blisters my hand. Darkness then. Like a thousand endless nights at sea. It presses on me — an immoral, clammy hand. A severed zebra head leers. Painted pagan spears tumble to the African plain, then right themselves again. The grass is harsh. No one. Only the shadows dance, and they dance alone. I advance to daylight and the door swings shut behind me. I hear it shatter, leaded crystal in shards to pierce my heart. Whirling and there is only a wall. The passage to the lost continent is lost again. Another staircase. It leads to hell and I must follow. A ferry docked at one landing. I can't afford the price. Waves batter the small boat and lap about my legs. The steps continue. Fog rolls past. Or is it smoke? Heat envelops this fragile shell I inhabit. I must burst. Stairs end at a wall with no way through. I ascend and find myself in the cellar. It reeks of bones in the dirt. Rain beats against me from the other side of the window. Lightning flashes lavender in the tawny twilight as darkness falls with a crash about my shoulders. Quarry forgotten. A door from nowhere to everywhere looms above. I see through to tomorrow. I must pass, but this day isn't done. The shadow of Philippe beckons me on. I walk through hazy perceptions to reach him. Gone. Only alabaster torsos writhing and glistening in the liquid moonlight. They stop for none. No matter. Outside shines with the dark blaze of damnation. I long to share its joy. The drone of voices increase their wails to a chorus of hallelujahs. I walk into the window and beyond. Where are the singers? I see them below. They lift up their sacred faces to me. I cannot resist. The light of their joy flashes through the sky, and I am pelted with the tears of their acceptance. I must join them. Oh joy. Oh joy!

Philippe, hiding behind the huge Greek statue, saw Edouard walk slowly out onto the balcony. The storm outside rocked the house with its fury. He saw him poised on the railing, four stories above the rough cobblestones of the courtyard. Realizing Edouard's intentions, a bolt of sheer terror raced through him and he fumbled for the latch on the door. Wrenching it open he rushed out into the raging elements. His foot slipped on the wet marble, but he recovered and lunged toward his friend.

An unseen blow from heaven drives me to the stone. The cold of cadaver's hand on my face. Not good enough. I have been judged. No chance now to join. No elation in my voice. Oh sorrow. Oh sorrow. Oh.

The water now lapped peacefully against the top of the watergate. At the top floated the edge of a black cloak, behind the gate the sky had turned a brilliant pink, hinting at the beauty of the day to come. The long night had finally ended.

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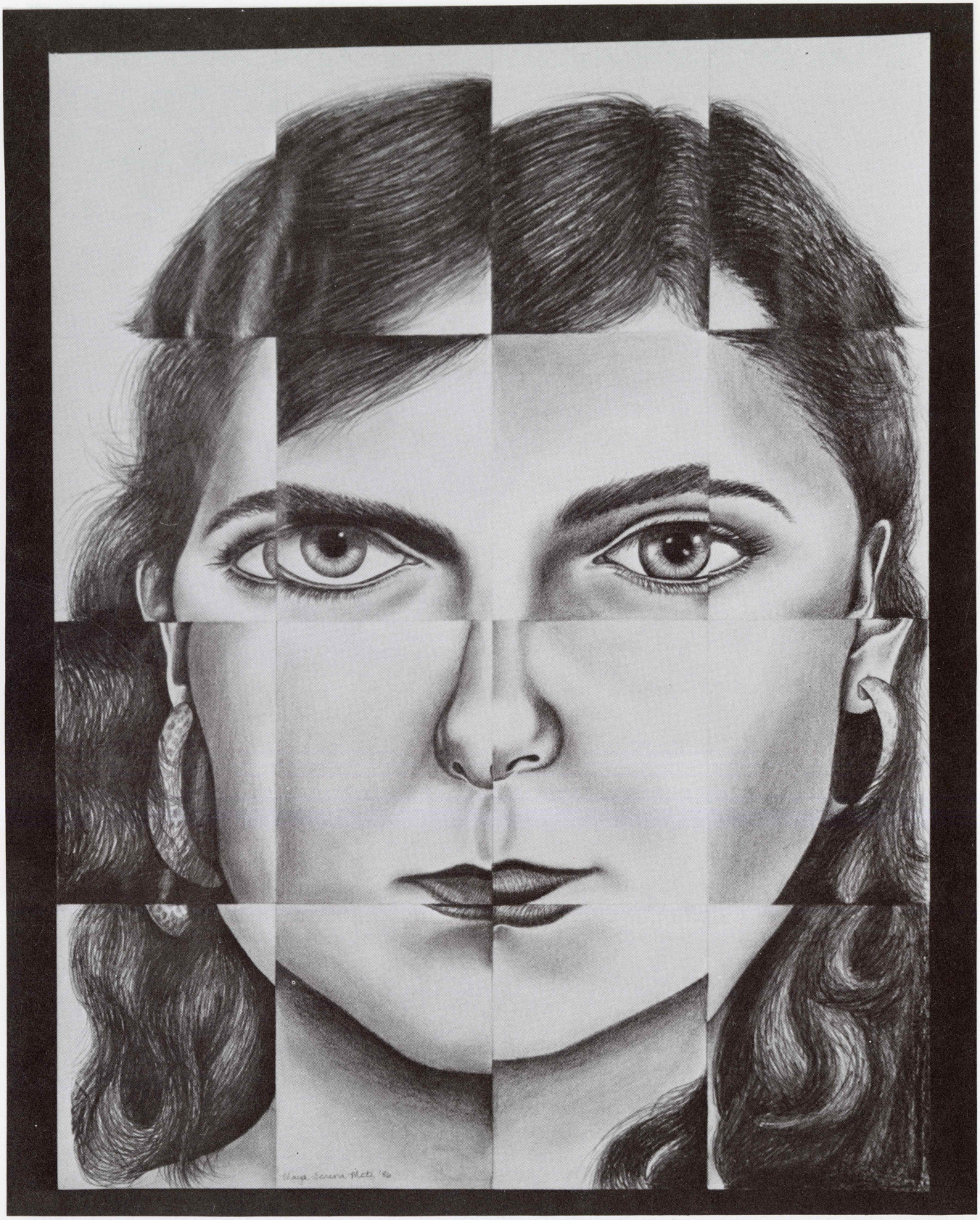
Kathy McLaughlin is a junior English major from Kingsport, Tennessee.



Maya Metz is a senior art major from Montevallo.

Foreshadows Fall On My Eyelids at Dawning

Pheasants and French horns
fly and ring
Pre-pubescent voices
sing your ode to this dying dream
Tell the riddle
to those who don't have their own

I see my reflection in your guitar
sister of the moon
dark lover of the sun
Where did you come from
and when will you leave
I have things to do
so don't look at me
as if we've already met
you'll have to sit quietly
or you cannot watch at all

My days have lost their numbers
and there's no more time for counting
piercing fingers reach for me
as I run into the scattered night
of sugar cane and chicken scratches
I jumped out of the barn
trying to catch the owl
and still tried to dance
with body bleeding
and arms outstretched
I lie beneath the oak
of my childhood

No harm will come to this one
the ancient grandmother said to the
young girl
staring up with wide green eyes
The time is now she said that
white night
and lying on her feather bed
taking the hand of the child said
remember
and shut her eyes
Sister I hear you calling me now
as I stand underneath
the Indian summer moon
but my words are not good enough
to answer

My ears are ringing
with the cries of the starling crow
and the time has come to tell of the
muse's dream
when I loved an American Knight
wrapped my talcum powder thighs
around his silent heart

my soul screaming for retaliation
only to find love in the eyes of
my lazy Da Vinci
I peeled my skin like an eggshell
as a sacrifice for his palette
and still the canvas is white
so we cut off our hands
and threw them into a sea of jealousy
and my Da Vinci faded into the
dim light of yesterday

Kiss me I begged of the crying god
as I held him close
his tears dripping down my shoulders
and watched as he slid out of my grasp
and went down the falling water
Now I stand on the edge of the cliff
looking into the clear deep blue
and remember when the swans
fished me out and dried my wings
so that I could fly
gently weeping for words
and finding them in a dimly lit corner
where the only sound is a fly
buzzing in my ear
getting lost in my hair

The western sun is calling
and a part of me is dying
but not of its own free will
so I must murder it
the blade is in my hand
my legs yearn for speed
they want to be on their way
but death must come
for the load is too heavy
You are the young one
and you must learn this song
take it and all I have shown you
when your travelling time is at hand
These things I remember
and many things have I yet
I thrust the blade into my chest
and the Celtic witch watched
as the dark woman removed the evidence

In satisfaction they stood
tall over their victim
lying blue in the cradle of a
  hungry tiger lily

Our ears hear flutes and drums
calling us to come to the desert
to the sands of the dead one's birth
Holding hands
we stand bleached by the moon

Untitled

The earthquakes rumbled
and our Mother's blood boiled
under my feet

I opened the door
and you — wiping the sweat from your
brow
stood there
bright-eyed and smiled
said I am breakfast
eat me

and I did
and you wrapped me
around your fingers
like Esher's
four-legged twelve-jointed
creatures crawling
up stairs down stairs
hoping for a level plane

but you pulled off my blindfold
and I was only then blinded
and the war we fought
with the rising sun
baked us and we fell
cracked and crumbling

off the edge of the crater
becoming ashes
falling watched by patronizing eyes
landing only to be washed away

useless and forgotten dust

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Cynthia McGinnis is a senior English major from Gadsden.

To Pierce and Dream

To look up
into piercing brown
deep set
and lock my dreaming green to it
and stare
finding ice-and-fire hunger there

To run my fingertips
through wavy raven locks
from nape to crown
the piercing brown
rolls back
and disappears
behind bronze Venetian blinds

The dreaming green
disappears
behind apricot curtains
as they slowly lower
I fall into the
pillow warmth
of a redwood
My hands clasp the back of
Michelangelo's child
as bronze anacondas
constrict
and with mother tenderness
hold me tight

To stand on deck
as the boat begins to rock
side to side
to the rhythm
of the song
of human whales
Terpsichore

To press my ear to a bronze barrel
Inside someone pounds a drum
with fierce intensity
to match my own

The piercing green
appears
and looks up
into dreaming brown
then slightly down
As one
green and brown
disappear
behind curtains and blinds
Closer
as I long for the fullness of tulips

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Michael Cook is a sophomore commercial art major from Oxford/Anniston.

Starring Them and Us

Part I
The Bead Lady

These brides of the Devil come smiling in here to work with their blood red fingernails dripping with the blood of helpless, little babies. How they grin and laugh as they go by with their long, sharp, bloody, red, red fingernails pointing at me. They'd better smile and laugh now while they can. They won't always be laughing. The Lord will have the last laugh. These ungodly women will be called to account for the suffering they have caused. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus.

> I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

Oh, I hear what they have to say about me, what they call me. I hear those names they call me — "Wacko," "Crazy Eleanor," "Old Babbling Beads." I hear it all. They mean for me to hear it. The Lord hears it, too. He hears the cruel and vulgar things they say. And he sees the deadly, deadly deeds they do. He sees it all — sees these women whose faces are smeared with that evil makeup, the makeup that comes from helpless, little fetuses. Makeup from babies, from baby bone and baby flesh. The Lord knows where they get their makeup. He hears all and he sees all and he knows all. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus.

> He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I am tired. My feet are tired from years of walking, but I won't sit down. I won't quit. Not when my Jesus walks with me. Walk with me, Jesus. Walk with me. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus.

They point and laugh and make fun of my clothes and my shoes. But, Jesus doesn't care what I wear. I don't have to dress up for Jesus; he takes me as I am. Holy Perfect Jesus takes me as I am. Let them laugh at my tired feet and my old slippers. Just let them laugh while they can. They've never walked in my shoes. They've never walked with me the way Jesus has. They don't know what I know. But Jesus knows and Mary knows. Our Lady knows.

I won't step aside; I won't be moved. Not as long as this murdering continues. Jesus is the only one who moves me. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus. Jesus moves with me. Jesus walks with me.

There'll come a time when these brides of the Devil will get down before the Lord. Their time is coming, coming soon. The end is at hand for these brides of the Devil.

> I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

There's a few of them I'd like to reach out and grab as they go by — like that one who sat behind me at Father Edwards' trial, that one who's always looking at me. I'd like to take her by the shoulders and shake some sense into her, shake her till she could see. I'd like for her to see me, really see me.

I'd like to hold her down and wash her face. Maybe if she would wash her face, her eyes could see that she is killing herself each time she murders these gifts of life, God's gifts of love to the wicked, wicked world. These are sacred lives, these precious babies' lives that she sucks up in the Devil's machines. She is feeding those machines with sacred life. All life is God's life. Only God can decide. Only God.

> Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.

I would've cut off my arm; I would've died myself before I'd have sacrificed my baby to the Devil. There is no power in this world that could've talked me into giving up my baby. I'd not have let those counselors of the Devil counsel me. No, never. The Devil could never have sucked my baby from me. My baby, my precious baby. My precious, sacred baby.

Holy Perfect Jesus. Sweet Little Baby Jesus. Jesus is going to return my baby, is going to bring my baby back to me. If these women knew. If they could only know what I went through. My baby was my all. He was the life of my life. Blood of my blood. If I could tell them. If they would only listen. Listen as Jesus listens. Listens as Mary listens to me. If they would only listen.

That one who carries that sign about "sisterhood" — if she would only listen. Am I not a sister? I'd like to ask her, "Who is thy sister? Who is thy sister?" But that's all right by me — I don't want to be a sister of brides of the Devil. Mary is my sister. Yes, Jesus, Mary is my sister.

> Hail, Mary, full of grace! the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

If they could feel. If they could feel what it was like, what it still feels like every day of my life. If they could be made to feel. Jesus, teach them to feel. Mary, Sister Mary, Mother Mary, make them feel.

> Hail, Mary, full of grace! the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

If they could've been in that hospital in Tuscaloosa, if they could've been in that hospital with me those months

after it happened, after I found my baby, my precious baby — so still in his crib. My Michael lying still and silent in his crib. Holy Perfect Jesus. "Crib death" those doctors called it. Talking to me about "crib death." Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus. Touch me, Jesus. Walk with me, Jesus. Those doctors in Tuscaloosa all standing around me, all talking at once, saying . . .

Jesus, my Jesus. Walk with me, Jesus. Sister Mary, Mother Mary, walk with me.

> Hail, Mary, full of grace! the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

These women today do not hear and do not see and do not know and do not feel. How can they walk in here and give up their babies, throw God's wondrous gift of love back in his face, lie down before the Devil and let him suck their blessed fruit? How? Jesus, how?

These whores and brides of the Devil who work here, these young women who come here, who walk through those deadly doors demanding, "Abortion, abortion, abortion!" It is the Devil's word, the Devil's own word, the Devil's own work. Whores and sluts. Hussies and lesbians. The Devil's harem.

But the wages of sin is death. They will suffer and die for all the deaths they've caused, for all the innocent, little lambs they've slaughtered. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus.

My feet hurt and my head hurts. But I'll go on. I'll go on. No matter if I do ache all over. No matter. I'll come here as long as they do. Every day this clinic, this house of horrors opens its doors, I'll be here. The Lord knows he can count on me. I'll be here. Lord, I'll be here.

The time will come. It's coming soon. I feel it coming. It's coming any day now. Their faces will be washed. Their souls will be stripped. Their hearts they've given to the Devil will be split in two. They will stand naked before God. These death squad women and that Death Devil they adore will die.

Jesus will own this clinic, this sucking death chamber. This will be the private property of Jesus Christ. He will come down from on high and stand here and march here on this sidewalk — his sidewalk — and join hands with us. They won't be putting any of us in jail then. It won't be long. Father Edwards said last Sunday, "It won't be long." Our triumphant voices will shout, "Death no more! Death no more!" Oh, glorious mystery, death will be no more.

I'll hold my baby in my arms again. My Michael will smile in my arms again. Holy Perfect Jesus. My heart will live again. Holy Perfect Jesus. Holy Perfect Jesus, death will live no more. Death will be no more. Father Edwards will smash those machines for the last time. Death for the last time. Death no more.

Listen to me, you brides of the Devil, you painted whores, you murderers, leave this place today while you can. Leave while you can walk away. Choose life. Go and sin no more. Turn away from these Gates of Hell. Choose life. Choose life, and sin no more.

Part II
A Bride of the Devil

The day hasn't officially started yet, and I'm tired already. Last night I stayed up late watching this movie about Houdini. Now, I feel as if I could sleep about a week without even turning over once. In another ten minutes, I need to be at work. I can't say I'm in any hurry though. I'm going to sit here as long as I can. Just sit still as long as I can.

Almost every Saturday morning, I park here across the street from the Southtown Women's Clinic and watch the show before I go inside. I tell myself I do it to rest up for the day ahead, but that's not why. I don't know exactly why I sit over here. I really don't.

It's like watching a bad play that never ends. I seem to be right smack dab in the middle of one of the worst plays of the century. I call it "Stuck." "Stuck" — starring them and us. The scenes never change. The acting is awful. And God knows we all say the same lines.

I try not to say too many lines. Every once in a while, I snarl something at Reverend Headley or Father Sledge Hammer, but not often. I hardly ever say anything to Red Ted or the Bead Lady or the Barbies. And I sure as hell don't say anything to Captain God Bless America. Most of the people who work here do though, especially my roommate Katie. She likes to have at it with the Captain. I've begged and begged her to stay clear of him, but she's fearless. Always has been. And Red Ted — the things Katie says to Red Ted make me cringe.

There he is now, looking as if he were alive. But Red Ted is not exactly alive, not exactly a person; he's more like an actor, a third-rate actor carrying a stick with a bloody, stupid sign on it. There he stands. The poor bastard. I just can't get him off my mind. I seem to be drawn to him for some reason. Maybe it's his vacant eyes.

I don't understand it. I'm drawn to all of them. I find myself sitting here year round, year after year — sitting and staring.

The thing of it is, I don't ever figure anything out. Everybody who works here, including my sister Anna, has given up trying. I've given up, too. But still I sit and stare.

I can't help wondering where they come from. I've lived in this neighborhood many years. They weren't here. Then one day they were here. And there they are now. If only I could get some kind of grip, some kind of reasonable explanation. The best I can come up with is that the world is a bad play, a bad play getting worse.

My father once told me that Jesus said, "Call no man a fool." But that's what they are — fools. Fools to the last degree.

Them and us. Us and them. I'm sick to the teeth of it. I really am. Sick of them. Sick of us.

Last night Katie said Red Ted and I should get married. She said it might help calm this feud. She really ticked me off when she said that. Teasing me about Ted has become her favorite pastime. I guess I don't have much of a sense of humor.

I laugh when I have to, and sometimes I have to, but not often. When I first saw the red, white, and blue bumper sticker on Reverend Headley's new, customized van, I laughed all right. I had to laugh, but it wasn't funny. It didn't feel good. It felt more like sneezing repeatedly or throwing up, something you find yourself doing before you realize what is happening to you. His bumper sticker says, "Equal rights for unborn women." To me that's like saying, "Equal rights for the non-existent." But, there's no reasoning. They have their own reason. We have ours. I know I have mine. My reason.

Some mornings when Red Ted — all 250 pounds of him — blocks me on the sidewalk, I look into his eyes, and I become speechless. I don't know his language, and he doesn't know mine. English is his second language; the Bible is his first.

I can tell when he's trying to talk to me because I can see his mouth moving and his face turning red, more red than it usually is. But, for the most part, he doesn't talk; he screams. Words like "sin," "murderer," "baby murderer."

I don't believe for one minute that he really does think I'm a murderer. If he did, he wouldn't always get so close to me.

One morning last month when he shoved one of those little, pink, plastic fetuses (Swap-a-Life sells them for $7.50.) in my face — practically down my throat — I couldn't believe it. This grown man is holding a plastic fetus, I thought. A grown man with a plastic, toy fetus in his hand.

Anna says this group is not really a religious group. She says they're not Christians at all but a cult of fetus worshippers. She might have something there. They carry big, brightly-colored posters of fetuses, and they hand out pamphlets with pictures of fetuses on each page. Sometimes they bring bottles of fetuses with them. I can't figure out where they get those things. Anna says they look like goat fetuses. But all the same, I wonder where they get the goats.

Ted has his bottle with him almost every week. I take a lot of ribbing about Red Ted. Katie started it of course. Now, the other counselors, the policemen, the nurses, and even the doctors have plenty to say to me about him. My "boyfriend" they call him.

"How's your boyfriend today?" they ask.

"Is your boyfriend out front yet?"

"Looks like your boyfriend has put on a few pounds since last week."

The way I see it, Red Ted is not the problem. I can't see him as anyone's problem but his own. Somehow he's not the one to focus on to get to the heart of this matter — as if we could get to the heart of this matter. I suppose what I mean is that it's painful to struggle with him. Some of them are so easy to fight. Not Ted. Fighting Reverend Headley and Father Sledge Hammer is tiring, but not sad.

Reverend Hollis A. Headley is the pastor of the New Rock of Ages Metropolitan Church in Center Point. "Sinner Point," Katie and Anna have named it. Katie and I drove out to Sinner Point one night when we were stoned to see what his church looked like.

"We need to see what we're up against," Katie said. I already knew what we were up against, but I wanted to ride around awhile. Katie was driving. It felt so peaceful to sit still and ride and ride and ride. I almost forgot what we were looking for. But Katie hadn't.

There was a large sign in front of it flashing, "SHOOTING for HEAVEN in '87 — SHOOTING for HEAVEN in '87" Katie stole the lights behind the S's and changed the message to "HOOTING for HEAVEN in '87 — HOOTING for HEAVEN in '87."

The building was new with a heavy, metal steeple on one side and a glassed-in tower on the other side. It was in the middle of a shopping center. For some reason they put churches in shopping centers these days.

Katie says the Presbyterians plan to have a home shopping TV channel. They're going to sell things awhile, then preach awhile, and then sell things again. I thought she was going slap out of her mind when whe told me that, but Melinda said she heard it, too. According to Katie, there's already a station like that in Florida called Highest Inspiration Station. She saw it when she was on vacation in July. She says they sell a lot of suntan lotion.

Melinda is the clinic director. She can't stand the sight of Reverend Hedley. One night she caught him slashing the tires on her car. By the time she ran inside to get Brad, one of the clinic policemen, he was gone. She had to get three sets of new tires during the last year.

Melinda used to go to church, not just on Sunday mornings, but Sunday nights and Wednesday nights also. She used to teach Methodist Youth Fellowship. After years of tangling with Reverend Headley and Father Sledge Hammer, she's become an agnostic or an atheist or something she thinks they're not — a Unitarian maybe.

"You don't have to quit going to your church because of the likes of them," Anna tells her.

"The hell I don't," she says.

"Well, you don't have to quit believing in God — not if you want to believe in God," I tell her.

"The hell I don't."

Ava, the counseling supervisor, says Reverend Headley is a saint compared to Father Sledge Hammer. She was here alone the morning Father Hammer came on his holy mission. He held a sledgehammer over her head while his accomplice destroyed the equipment in one of the procedure rooms upstairs. Eventually, Father Hammer went to jail, not for threatening to smash Ava or for destroying clinic property, but for violating the conditions of his parole. He's out of jail now, and he never did tell who his accomplice was.

Recently, Ava has been trying to joke about it. "He no playa the game; he no maka the rules." Or, "Holy Terror! This violence is getting to be a habit with the Catholics." It's not funny though, a priest wearing a ski mask and slinging a sledgehammer.

It seems to me there was a time when Christians had more sense than they do now. When we were little, Anna and I used to sit in the front pew and listen to Daddy preach. My father never strutted and duckwalked back and forth across a stage, foaming at the mouth, screaming at his congregation to vote Republican and piss on women. But there's no point in living in the past. They're the ones whose

heads are turned backward.

Captain God Bless America has this fancy motorcycle helmet with a special shield in the back. It makes him look as if his head is turned completely around backward and that his body is facing the opposite direction. Whenever I see him coming down Tenth Avenue, his motorcycle seems to be going backward — going backward too fast.

Katie likes to argue with the Captain. I can't bear to watch their scenes. One of these days he'll punch her out or knife her or do something dreadful. I know he will; it's inevitable. Katie says what's saved her so far is the fact that he doesn't want to mess up his clothes.

In the six months the Captain has been coming here, he's always worn a red, white, and blue jumpsuit. Katie says he never takes it off. Melinda wants to start a fund to get him a suit so he can look as nice as the other Christians. As far as I'm concerned, he already looks as nice as they do.

On the back of his jumpsuit, there's something written in Hebrew. We asked Karl, one of the doctors who's Jewish, what it says. He didn't want to tell us at first, said he never learned to read Hebrew. I knew he could; I'd heard him read before at a party. We nagged him until he told us. The Captain's jumpsuit says "Jews for Jesus" on it. I can't believe Captain God Bless America is a Jew. He doesn't look a bit like Houdini. Besides, there aren't any stupid Jews. Every one I've met was brilliant.

The Captain doesn't come in the cars or vans with the other picketers. He makes his grand entrance on his big, shiny red bike. On the front of the bike is a specially made tag with the words "Captain" and "America" written in bright blue letters. In between the words is the outline of an American flag with "God Bless" written in gold letters on top of it. As he comes backward down the street, the first thing I see is that tag announcing, "Captain God Bless America."

Brad says the Captain is a member of The Devil's Own, a biker club in Bessemer. When Brad was working the vice squad a few years ago, he arrested him on a public nuisance charge.

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I know I should get out of this car and go inside. I know it's time. But I tell myself I'll wait for Anna and walk in with her. That's what I tell myself. Just five more minutes.

I'm glad Katie came to work early today. I like to think she's already safe inside.

I'm glad for Ted's sake as well as hers. When Katie's having at it with the Captain or the Reverend, I'm all for her. But, if the truth be told, when I see Dr. Katie Rack with her string of degrees — her B.S. in this, her Master's in that, her Ph.D. in whatever — about to pounce on Ted — the poor, dim-witted bastard — I can't help pulling for Ted.

A couple of years ago he accidentally showed me a certificate he got from an organization in Texas, the Actualized Bible Study Association. I saw it when he was trying to show it to some of the other picketers. They didn't seem too interested.

He'd completed a correspondence course and was so proud. I don't know why I said it, but all of a sudden, I told him I'd get him a frame for the certificate. I meant it, too. I wasn't kidding; I never kid. He really smiled at me. About that time, Reverend Headley joined us. Ted remembered who he was talking to and started screaming, "Baby murderer!"

Katie was at the front desk when she looked out the window and saw him screaming at me. She dashed out of the clinic screaming at Ted about being fat. Reverend Headley screamed that she was a whore. Melinda hurried out to break it up, but instead began screaming that Reverend Headley was a goddamn Christbuster. Reverend Headley dropped to his knees there on the sidewalk and started talking in tongues. Something about hosanna and heathens and whores. When Brad came out and threatened to arrest everybody in sight, Ted began to cry.

"Heaven help us all," I whispered to keep from screaming along. "Heaven help us all."

The next day Katie was really after Ted. I knew she would be. I could tell that morning at breakfast she was planning her attack by the way she kept throwing the toast around on her plate. I know Katie as well as I know myself, probably better. Ted never should have let her see him cry.

"Please," I said to her before we left home, "please, leave him alone. The less you say to all of them, the better off we'll all be."

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"You know who I'm talking about. Leave him alone. For my sake, if not his, please leave him alone."

"I'm not going to hurt your boyfriend."

"I wish you and everybody else would stop calling him my boyfriend. I'm tired of hearing it. Besides, it's not funny."

I thought we'd arrived at an understanding, but as soon as she saw Ted on the sidewalk with his fetus bottle, she lit into him: "Now Ted, what does the Bible say about your body? You know your body is the Temple of God. Look at your temple, man. Your temple has gone to pot, and you know it. You've got to do something about your temple, man."

I didn't want to hear it. I ran inside as fast as I could. No-one was upstairs yet, so I went to the sitting room to be alone a few minutes. But, I couldn't help myself; I pushed the drapes back. I wanted to see, and I didn't want to see.

Ted had a sack from Burger King in one hand and that bottle with a goat fetus in the other. His left hand doesn't know what his right hand is doing, I thought. And he doesn't know anything. Ted Barnes doesn't know anything. Even less than the Barbies. The poor bastard doesn't know anything.

I watched him as his face turned redder and redder, the color of his carrot hair. His hands were trembling. Both of his shoelaces were untied.

Katie was shouting at him about being a communist. She gets such a charge out of harassing him about being a communist. "Red Ted, where do you get your money? You never seem to be at work. You're always out here. The Communist Party gives you money, right Ted? You get your money from the Party, don't you? Don't you? Huh?"

That business really gets next to him. He's bothered almost as much by the communist talk as he is by the

Temple of God nonsense. Katie says it's because he really is a communist.

So many times I've watched Katie chewing him up into little pieces. If I were a ventriloquist, I'd help him out. I'd put words into his mouth. I'd have him say, "Listen, Dr. Rack, if you're so smart, how come your life is not a richer one? If you're so smart, how come you're not even mildly happy? If you're so smart, how come you're not smart?"

But, I'm not a ventriloquist. I'm late. That's what I am — I'm late. When Anna gets here, I'll make myself go inside and go to work. But if I know Anna, she'll probably stop and carry on awhile with the Bead Lady. She always does.

Anna believes the Bead Lady is more of a goner than Ted. We call her the Bead Lady because she continuously fingers the beads of a black rosary. She sat behind us at Father Hammer's trial and fingered and chanted so heavily we could hardly hear Ava's testimony. She's always fingering and chanting, fingering and chanting. Her chant has three words in it. The first is "Holy." The last is "Jesus." We can't make out the middle word. It's "Holy — something — Jesus, Holy — something — Jesus, Holy — something — Jesus."

Anna says the Bead Lady must've had a bad experience when she was younger and that she's been helped by Christian counseling to feel insufferably guilty about it. It seems to me she may have been helped to lose her mind.

She wears house slippers, even when it's raining or cold. Every week, she has on the same maternity top. Being overweight and wearing that blouse, she gives the impression she is perpetually pregnant. She's been pregnant the seven years I've been seeing her.

The Bead Lady usually arrives before the Barbies in a long, black car. I think everything she owns is black. The Barbies, however, are colorful and wear the latest in fashion. They never wear anything dark, much less black.

The Barbies are three pretty, sparkling teenagers. Katie and Melinda call them the pro-teens. All of them have the same color eyes and hair. Today they are wearing soft, pink and white shirts. They look as smooth, light, and free of consciousness as three dainty dishes of strawberry ice cream. We identify them as Barbie One, Barbie Two, and Barbie Three.

Barbie Two was a patient here last June. She doesn't even suspect that if she had been pregnant and in need of an abortion before the year 1973, she would've had to have a coat hanger or the tubing from a fish tank or something even more imaginative crammed up her sweet, little ass by a quack. Good for her. The reason I continue in this theater of the streets is the Barbies — the Barbies they are, the Barbie I was, the hemorrhaging Barbie I was.

I know I've been sitting here a long time. Too long. But I'm really not waiting for Anna. She may be off today. I'm just waiting — sitting still and waiting. Maybe I'm waiting for Ted to put down his bottle and his cross and come over here and propose. I'd go to him, but I don't believe I can budge an inch.

Maybe I'm waiting for Jesus to come again — and bring my father with him.

Maybe Houdini will come again, too. I wish we could get Old Harry Houdini, the Handcuff King, into this show. He was something else. You could take Houdini and cover him from head to toe in chains, tie him up in ropes, lock him in a box, wrap the box with steel tape, lower the box to the bottom of the river, and 59 seconds later — 59 seconds later, he'd be sitting on the shore, whistling, filing his fingernails, and he wouldn't even be wet.

September 1987

Gratefully, I sit in the first booth
of Pratscher's Restaurant.
The magic words "Pratscher's Restaurant"
speak to me from the window.
I sit and I watch and I listen.
In front, the cars roll smoothly by,
while behind me there is talk of a recent explosion:
"It could happen to anyone, anyplace, anytime."
Anyhow, I imagine I am not anyone;
this is the safest place in the universe;
and this September is my September —
the first in over a decade
I've been free to sit still.
(So much depends on sitting still.)
Other years have been eaten alive
by busy days of telling fidgety students
what they could kindly do
with their commas, their semi-colons —
by days of passing out expert advice:
"End sentence here" or "Start new paragraph."
I am starting a new paragraph today,
dreaming along in this small, slow town.
A woman in the second booth tells her friend
she was planning to get her son a computer,
"was" planning to.
I hear her troubled voice rise and fall
while I watch the golden autumn light
easing through the door with each new customer.
"But he said, 'if I can't have an Apple IIe,
I don't want one at all.' "
And I, who have turned away from everything
that is not perfect moments of perfect light,
know exactly how he feels,
this brat of hers who thinks he knows
what he wants
what he has to have
in his one and only living life.

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Rita Sparks is a Graduate English major from Birmingham. "The Bead Lady" and "A Bride of the Devil" are the first two parts of a larger work entitled Starring Them and Us.

Paula Reynolds is a senior art major from Montevallo.

The Eggs of Despair

In a distant world called Keatonville
There lived a lady in an humble cottage.
She was a sad one, the lady,
and rarely left the brooding dark of the interiors for the light of Day.
She much preferred the shadows,
for it suited her melancholy.

Edna is no June Bride,
Though she once was, long ago.
Now, in the maturation of Time, she has become tired
And old,
Her fire extinguished and never rekindled

She is not alone though she is not comely.
Her husband's name is Dan,
Son of Frederick,
Son of William.
His days are maintained at the Hardware City,
Bargaining and selling goods.

Whence Edna had established a slow numbing sorrow,
Dan had a rage build up that would never subside.
His was an anger at opportunity,
Something he would ne'er come alongside,
Ne're grasp.
and for this reason, among others,
(For few things are contained in one source)
He bore Edna ill.

Even now, at this moment, she is there
Alone,
Cooking.

At the strike
Of eight in the night,
Dan is returning homewards.
With Lady Luna cool overhead,
His thoughts are addled with mead,
And his brain is turning into a dark loathing animal.
He has just been released from
His esteemed position at
Hardware City.
A desperate rage grows up around him,
And his mighty hand
Gets white-knuckled around the steering wheel.

His steed rides on through the countryside,
Silver in the light.
With his ebony cane he whips the beast
faster.

There were days when their house was full
And comrades would come and celebrate in song.

But 'twas not long till Dan's rage stood clear
And the friends seldom came.
Edna was full then, with Dan's first heir,
Soon to be called
Samuel.
In Samuel,
Edna saw her light gleam and looked to the
Day with quiet rejoice.
Samuel would be a child from her blood;
She lay awake in the dark, feeling her stomach
And anticipating.

But there was once a day when Dan was cross with Edna,
For Edna made a mistake,
And Dan governed her strongly.
Because of this Edna was made to go
to the Hospital,
a victim.

For Dan's trouble an heir was born to his house — Dead.

An unfortunate incident,
And Edna fell into a devastating gorge
Known only to those who have experienced great loss.
For weeks she was caught in the clutch
Of Abandon, till Dan tired
Of that too.
With prodding from Dan
She soon forgot her almost son, and
Went on with her life.

Beset with tasks, Edna hears the clock
Ring eight.
The fire in the hearth casts an otherwise
Open glow; a kettle of
Beans hangs above it, boiling.
Steam rises out into the air.

Edna springs to her chores with
Twice the vigor.
He is coming home soon, and he will want his supper.
Spent already, she snatches a broom
And begins sweeping the linoleum floor.

Minutes later, Dan pulls into the driveway
And gets out.
His bottom lip is ragged, from aggravation.
On his way in he gives the door a good rap
With his cane.

Edna welcomes him and takes his coat.
His features hard, he turns on the news and
Sits down at the table.
Earthquakes and ravage become the
Day's topics and he switches it off
with the tip of his cane.

Edna hurries in from the rear
And begins transferring beans to plate
Dan broods at her back,
Irritated that it was not ready when he came in.

Edna puts his plate in front of him
And wipes her hands
with her apron.

Dan: "I got fired today."

A storm passes on her face, but she keeps silent.
She goes around and gets her plate,
And takes it to the kettle.

Dan: "I don't give a shit. Fuck 'em."

His voice was slick with ale, and it fell in
With the wind rising outside.
A storm would be coming tonight.

Edna sits down
And begins to eat.
Dan's steed neighed nervously,
Heavy with the marauding gale.

Dan: "Did you hear what I said?"

Dan's voice is terrible and rings in the
Rafters of the room.

He raps his cane on the floor.

Dan: "DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID!"

Edna: (softly) "Yes."

And nodded.
She keeps her eyes on the table.

Dan pulls around straight in his chair
And begins eating.

Dan: "We ain't got nuthin in the bank,"

He says between mouthfuls,

"I guess we'll hurt fawhile."

Snort.

Dan: "You better suck it up gal,
I guess you gone learn what it's like to starve."

Edna mumbles something, still eating.
At her breast was a spreading shroud,
Covering her up.
Dan resumes eating, embraced in his problems.
The soft clink of cutlery
Is overwhelmed by the thunder outside,
And the human noises of peasants in the street ferreting out
Shelter before the storm.

And slowly, in her eye,
A gleam creeps up and is
rubbed away before it is noticed.

The moment is silence.
Edna's hand moves up to a locket
Hanging around her neck,
sparkling in the firelight.
It makes her feel stronger.
It gathers benign feelings almost as if . . .

And Edna sneezes violently,
A reeking mix of beaned saliva
And flimsy snot.
She sneezes at a straight line,
As an arrow
Toward Dan,
At Dan.

Time ceases to run.
Thunder booms outside.
The two glare at each other,
Edna with snot under her nose
and Dan with snot and beans across his.
Sweating fear, Edna screwed her eyes tight,
All her body ringing with horror.

Dan: (Eyes lit by the fire) (savagely) "Shit."

He grabs his cane with uncommon strength.

Dan: (Stealing anger from the day) "You'll not do that again."

He lays a blow on the side of her face with the cane.
She falls off of her chair.
He gets up and strides over to her.

Dan: (He hits her again) "I lost my job."

Dan: (He hits her again) "I lost my job."

Dan: (*Whack,* a piece of wood on meat), I lost my job."

And another.
And another.

Finally, Dan stops, and looks at what lies on the floor.
The rain begins, and the house fills with soft
Music as it hits the roof.

They buried the lady three days later.
Therein they laid her, loved by none,
In the boat's embrace.
It was set afire and pushed off
Into the sea.

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Paul Schattel is a junior English major from Pelham.

A New Pair of Shoes: An Essay in Violence

I saw an old man get beat to death with a club last night. Right after I stepped outside to throw up, I heard his screams. When I looked up I saw two punks beating him, but only one had a club. The other had big boots.

By the time I was through throwing up again, the punks were gone and some kid was asking me if I had seen what happened.

"FUCK OFF!" I hated the kid already.

"Sombody killed that old man!"

"No! He's just passed out. It was some party."

"Man, there's blood everywhere, didn't you see what happened?" The kid was freaking out.

"All I saw was my puke."

"God, how could anyone do that?"

"Oh, don't worry, I do it all the time."

"I was talking about the old man."

"Damn it! I am an old man."

I left the stupid kid standing in my dinner, wondering why they had killed the old man. I could have told him. I know why they killed him. They killed him because he was fat. Punks hate fat people and queers, but they always knife queers. They beat fat people because they don't like having to poke their knives into all that fat.

Sometimes they'll beat a queer, but they'll never knife a fat guy.

— —

When I woke up I was out of beer so I went to the store.

They had taken the fat guy away, but they left the stain. The assholes.

Thinking about last night made me want to throw up again, but I choked it down and kept walking.

I made it to the store with my stomach intact and was trying to find the cheapest beer when this blonde walked in that was so beautiful I almost fainted. She had on this skimpy little skirt that showed off her ass and a half T-shirt that just barely held the rest of her in.

I was in shock.

She was getting beer and I was just standing there gaping when this asshole jock-looking guy walked up. They were obviously together because she handed him the beer and they walked off.

I grabbed a case and followed them. I couldn't believe it! All the beautiful girls in the world and I was going to get drunk alone. Again! It wasn't fair!

I wanted to kill the blonde. It was her fault anyway. I could just grab her around the neck and squeeze. She would die before they got me off of her.

But I didn't do that.

I got into a check-out lane instead. I'm a coward.

At first I was so mad about the blonde that I didn't notice the fat lady in front of me. But when I did I was amazed. Never in my life had I seen anything like it. This lady was huge. It was phenomenal. There were rolls of fat everywhere. It was intriguing. I just wanted to touch it. See what it felt like.

I was sweating.

I wanted to kiss it and cuddle it. I wanted her to come home with me.

Then she checked out and started to leave, another lady walking away from me. But I wasn't going to let this one go. I paid for my beer, got my change, and left. Then I ran outside looking for her. I spotted her down the road, walking toward my part of town. I couldn't believe it. How lucky could I get? I could just catch up with her, talk for a while, then invite her to my place for a drink.

She didn't move very fast, so I didn't have a hard time following her — watching her. She sort of jiggled as she walked. It sent a chill down my spine. I was so excited.

I was just about to run up ahead and catch up with her when these three punks jumped out and starting beating her.

They had her down in a second.

This time I had to do something, so I dropped the beer and ran toward them. One of the punks saw me coming and pulled a knife.

"Hey man, I'm no queer. I just wanted to help."

"Cool."

My pants were wet before I had kicked her three times. She stopped screaming after a while, so I picked up my groceries and invited the punks over for a beer.

They didn't come, so I got drunk alone again.

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The Silent Lament

Dead children
crowd in gutters
hoping for handouts
from overweight gangsters
who pass in a frenzy
without looking back.

Sad mothers
sell favors
for a quarter
to drooling college kids
who only have a dime.

At the end of the day
they're all overtired
from hauling no weight
and dodging swift kicks
from sideways men
in black leather boots.

Dead children,
sad mothers
sleep in the mud
under noisy bridges
where losers live
and poison hangs in the air.

The banker
and his wife
complain of the bums
and the niggers
who sit on the street
with outstretched hands.

No mention is made
of the hungry young girl
whose tears they both passed by.

The answers
that are needed
are to questions
that aren't asked
for no one feels
that they should bring it up.

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Bryce R. Norther, alias Hank Bukey, is a student at the College of Rock and Roll and a resident of Montevallo.